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BY HUGH DE SÉLINCOURT

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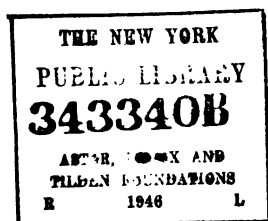
A BOY'S MARRIAGE

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BY
HUGH DE SÉLINCOURT
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A BOY'S MARRIAGE

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**Of naught but earth can Earth make us partaker,
But knowledge makes a king most like his Maker**

A BOY'S MARRIAGE

I

IT was the quadrangle of an old college at Oxford and the moon was shining upon the grey crumbling walls. From one window blazed the glare of unscreened electric lights, and the final chorus from a comic opera, rendered with more gusto than talent, troubled the stillness. At another window was the outline of a man half hidden by the curtain. The song ceased. There was the clatter of plates, the clinking of glasses, and the hubbub of voices and laughter. Some one leaned out of the window and shouted "Girlye, girlye," and the figure moved away from the curtain. Comparative quiet followed; the roisterers were listening to a tale; for a moment was heard the stirring outset of the "March of the Priests" in *Athalie*, which a man whistled softly and resolutely as he walked across the quad with a pile of books under his arm. His

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tune was interrupted by shouts of laughter and cries of "There's the Brucer," "Good old Brucer," "Come up and drink with me, Napoleon," and a tangerine was flung at his head, and missing him burst against the wall. The Brucer ran into a staircase and up the wooden stairs into a room upon the first floor.

"Come along, Girlie," he said, "plenty of time for sentiment later. What! You're packed and ready! It's only eleven. Come and drink some old and crusted, and forget it's your last evening. We won't stay long. I'm feeling sentimental myself."

"Yes. I suppose I'd better. I promised to look in at his 'after.' I simply couldn't dine with him at his twenty-first. Look here, I don't think I'll go. I'm utterly out of the mood for such an infernal row."

"Rot. It'll do you good."

Beverley Teruel was called "Girlie" from his innocent appearance and a habit of blushing. His innocence was honest, and due to the fact that he had been educated by a private tutor at home; for he was an only son, and his mother had been unable to bring herself to part with him.

The room was in wild disorder: a table, covered with fruit and biscuits and sweets and

decanters and glasses and spilled wine, was in front of the fireplace. Chairs lined the walls in places three deep, and the air was thick with tobacco smoke. In one corner two musicians, hired with the dessert, were playing the "Blue Danube" vigorously, and men were turning in the semblance of a waltz in the open space in the centre. One man was dancing with a broom with immense solemnity ; another marched round intently beating time on a pail with the handle of a fruit-knife.

As they entered, the waltz stopped and they were greeted uproariously. The drummer continued to march round beating time until his pail and knife were taken away from him and he was left disconsolate.

Beverley made his way to a sofa by the piano and sat down by a large man with a benign face and no collar, who was humming "Every morn I bring thee violets" to himself with much feeling.

"Ah ! Girlie, Girlie," he said, "I'm drunk. It's very sad. I've had a good time at the D.O.C. I always loved you and—I'll sing 'Violets' if I'm asked," he added confidentially. "And I will anyhow." He got up angrily as his offer remained unnoticed.

But at that moment the attention of every one was attracted by a man who pulled a chair into the

middle of the room and mounted it; he was a little man with a cherubic face, and a Scotch accent. He possessed a reputation for limericks.

"Gentlemen," he called out. "To the pure all things are pure," and waited smiling for the shouts of "No dirty tales," "Let's have it," and so on, to stop. As soon as he could make himself heard, he went on. "It pains me how little you have learned of my true and beautiful character. I merely wished to remind you that Napoleon has brought into this foul orgy our unsullied pearl, the college paragon of purity—and——"

The chair was kicked from under him amid roars of laughter, and the speech was abruptly ended. He emerged rumpled and uncrestfallen, and drank a glass of port with Beverley to prove the absence of all ill-feeling.

Bruce and Beverley managed to withdraw a little while after, under cover of a diversion caused by the large sentimentalist on the sofa, who could no longer be restrained from singing "Violets."

They walked across the quad in silence, wondering at the different methods men employ to cloak their feelings—by silence or by drinking, or by exposing them so arrogantly (as though with a finger-snap in the face of any who might

A Boy's Marriage 5

choose to laugh) that they seem but the facsimile of a sentiment.

As they went up the wooden stairs Bruce began to whistle his favourite march ; he seemed to need the encouragement of the tune.

Beverley's room was desolate : torn paper filled the fireplace ; all the pictures had been taken down ; the mantelpiece was bare of photos ; on the floor a corded book-box and a trunk were in obtrusive prominence ; a heap of old notebooks was piled upon the table. The change was more marked because Beverley had taken pride in his room. It was painful to see the holes made in the wall-paper by the nails upon which his favourite pictures had hung. He remembered the dethronement of the "Soul's Awakening"—the delight of his first term—from the place of honour above the mantelpiece, and how he had developed from the adoration of Greuze to the worship of Rossetti. The walls seemed to bear the stigma of his fickle taste.

Both had sat down at once, and neither had spoken.

Then Beverley rose. Going to the window he closed it, and drew the shutters and the curtains so that the noise from the party might not intrude on them. As he went back to the chair

he pressed his hand on Bruce's shoulder and said quietly, "Dear old chap."

Bruce grunted and was very pleased. Both were by nature exceedingly affectionate. Beverley often expressed his affection; Bruce never did. He looked upon his inability to express feeling as manly reticence; and he was very manly. His inarticulate grunt, however, told much to his friend.

Beverley broke the silence by saying—

"The world is all before us," anxious to change the point of view from memory to hope.

"Is it?" asked Bruce, who would not have owned to his relish of the sentimental joy of regret. "I thought your path was clearly marked—to a warm corner in a rich father's office. Not to mention other little details which show how much of the world is before you. And if I get the Fellowship, my world will be old Oxford, thank Heaven."

"Do you know I wish sometimes things weren't so arranged for me. Just think how magnificent life was to those Elizabethan fellows—Marlowe, Decker, Heywood. That one burst of wild excitement and then—death."

He had read the school of English language and literature. The Elizabethan period had been his special subject.

A Boy's Marriage

7

"All glamour and nonsense. Have the common sense to read between the lines."

"I do—right enough. But *joie de vivre*, *joie de vivre*—and an office. I suppose it is because I am going down, but I feel horribly depressed. Jove, I'm glad you are coming to see us."

"How about Miss Eva? Put her in your gloomy glass and you'll see things in their right light."

Beverley got up and fidgeted about the room. His friend watched him intently without moving his head. He leaned against the mantelpiece, finding it difficult to put his thoughts into words, chiefly because he doubted whether Bruce would understand his trouble. He made the effort, for he considered it disloyal to keep anything back from his friend, and said—

"You're a dear old chap. I'm gloomy even about that—in certain moods. I feel so young for marriage. I don't know myself. I talked to the pater about it. He beat me on the back and said, 'Marry her, my boy; trust your old father, you'll be happy and make her happy.' He married the mater fearfully young."

"If you love her and have got the money to marry her—I don't see your difficulty."

"I'm a drifting idiot, changeable. It's a beastly risk for a girl's happiness, being bound

to a fellow like me. You know what Shelley says about love?"

"A little. That's not to the point. You've got to make up your mind, and it's easy enough. She worships you, and you've known her all your life——"

"Not all—of course I know her—but myself. I feel I might do almost anything, just to see what it would be like. I want to live."

"Well, live with a wife. It's safer. All these dreams you've got in your brain from Shelley haven't anything to do with life—your life, at any rate."

Bruce was a man who never doubted his own opinion. He saw in Beverley a soft and pliant creature, very much favoured by fortune, a man for whom the steady influence of matrimony would be salvation from sullyng experience. He had always lived in shelter and ignorance, without becoming selfish or a prig; and Bruce determined that he would do all in his power to make that state of happy ignorance continuous. There was no need for him to know how cruel life could be. Bruce knew, or thought he knew. And he remembered with a smile his feelings when he put back into its nest a young bird that had tried the strength of its wings too soon; he had found it fluttering in a field in the early

A Boy's Marriage 9

summer, the old birds shrilly lamenting in half-circles above it. He liked to play the part of Providence, and he was exceedingly fond of Beverley.

He would have laughed at any one who hinted there might be points in Beverley's character the existence of which he did not suspect.

"Your father's right. It would be mad of you to give up certain happiness—certain as happiness can be—because of dreams. You mustn't let despondency blacken your outlook even for a moment. Be content—you have everything to make you contented—then you'll be happy."

True, he begged the question; but he was angry with Beverley for his doubts, imagining himself with plenty of money, and the chance of marrying the girl he loved. What more could a man want? he asked himself, and thought how it was his lot to earn every penny of money by hard work—by uncongenial work, if he did not get his fellowship. Really he had no envy, but he added with feeling, "You are damned lucky." Other people often seem so.

At twelve o'clock Bruce went back to his lodgings. Anxiety for the class he had taken routed the gentle forces of sentiment which had been roused within him. Sentiment was a

luxury a poor man could not afford, a man whose whole life turned on the chances of an examination. The thought braced the fighting instinct within him, and he walked down the High Street chest out and head erect, stepping along in time to his favourite march ; and as he walked he felt within him the resolution to succeed which is the first element of success.

Beverley continued to sit in his room, lost in a waking dream, a frame of mind which he invariably encouraged. His life had been happy, surrounded by love ; no jarring incident spoilt the harmony of his existence ; there was nothing that he regretted, nothing that he would change. A tutor who became his friend had educated him, taught him all he knew, and taught him well. His father and mother whom he loved had guarded him from contact with the world with scrupulous care ; and his inborn unselfishness had kept him lovable. Everything had conspired to help him. His father had brought him to Oxford, accidentally met Bruce, then in his first year, enraged him by asking him "to take my boy under your wing," and though prepared to hate "my boy" as a cub, the wing was soon laid over him, Bruce marvelling and the boy gratefully accepting its protection without wonder. He developed quickly at college. Men confided

A Boy's Marriage 11

their love troubles to him. So he felt that he knew the depths of the human heart from their confidences, and that he was familiar with the woes of life through his power of sympathy. And very rarely the desire for actual experience came upon him ; a desire which frightened him a little, at which he laughed a little, and which passing with its slight uneasiness, made him a little more happy to be what he was.

He lay back in his chair, brooding over his life at Oxford ; those three years had been splendid—splendid ! The memories this room of his stirred within him were very sweet, and the sweetest memory of all was the hour he had sat with Eva, the night of the college concert in eights week, sat with her alone—and she had promised to become his wife—and had allowed him to kiss her. He felt glad and proud that the first kiss he had given to any girl had been a kiss of love, given at that supreme moment to the girl he loved. Ah, he thought, that moment was more precious than any wild adventure, which after all must be somewhat vulgar.

Eva was waiting for him—he would see her to-morrow—would spend long days with her in the country ; and their joy would be increased by the gladness of his father and his

mother, who seemed to become young again in sharing the happiness of their son. His sister too, he was sure, was pleased he was going to marry a friend of hers. He loved his sister, he would soon convince her that he was not too young; for she had spoken gently to him—sadly almost—advising him to wait. He would soon convince her of the foolishness of delay for such happiness as his.

“Life is all before me,” he thought; and the vision of his life, surrounded by the love of those whom he loved best, was very beautiful.

He rose, and going to the window that looked out upon the quad, he drew aside the curtain and opened it. The college was silent, save for the occasional sleepy twitter of a bird in the gardens, the occasional whistle of a train in the distance, sounds which seemed to enhance the breathless silence. In the sky he saw the first faint streaks of the dawn, and as he watched the gentle change from night to day, he felt the breeze of the morning, that first sigh of the awakening earth, that came to him like a greeting, a harbinger from Mother Nature giving her sanction to his love. He clasped his hands and said softly, as though in answer—

“Eva, Eva, my little love, I’ll make you happy.”

A Boy's Marriage

13

And tears of joy were in his eyes.

That very day he would see her again ; hold
her once more in his arms and kiss her dear face.
He marvelled how he had been able to doubt
for an instant the wisdom of his love.

II

BEVERLEY was due to arrive home at fifteen minutes past five.

The entire household had spent the day in a state of happy excitement ; each one striving to think of some point which might add a lustre to his home-coming.

At breakfast Mrs. Teruel quietly announced that she intended to decorate his room with flowers. She was occupied all the morning in choosing and picking the most beautiful roses, and she arranged them many times in large bowls before she was satisfied with their appearance.

"And I do hope, Jane," she said to the housemaid, whose help she repudiated, "you will remember to set them outside his room when you turn down the bed the last thing, because their scent is so injurious."

Jane, who had at one time acted as nurse to Beverley, was almost injured that any one should think it necessary to give her such elementary

A Boy's Marriage 15

instructions regarding her boy's health. But she soon forgave her mistress ; she could well imagine the strain a mother's nerves must feel under stress of such an event—and she was such a mother, and he was such a son ! So she smiled as she laid lavender bags between his sheets and under the pillow, that everything might be sweet and home-like.

Mr. Teruel made an effort to protest against all this absurd fuss, and paced the garden trying to determine whether he should have champagne for dinner or whether it would be better to mix one of his famous Moselle cups. The solution came to him like an inspiration. He decided to have both. A small loving-cup at dessert would be entirely suitable to the occasion ; and finding there was not enough Chartreuse, he thanked Providence with pleasure at his own foresight and drove into the neighbouring town of Littlehampton to buy the best he could obtain from the grocer.

He was a tall man, distinguished only for his indolence and good nature. Had he been less good-natured he would have been clever ; had he been less indolent he would have been unhappy. As it was, he managed to avoid both points of danger and was contented.

Beverley actually arrived at half-past five. It

was a great moment. He, the only son, had come to live at home for good—in this case pleasantly synonymous with for ever—and once more the family would be undivided. For his marriage would involve no separation ; only an enlarging of the family heart to receive within its compass a new being—the lady of his love ; and an extension of the family garden, for the garden of the bungalow in which they were going to live would open into the garden of the Hall.

Mrs. Teruel was a little woman of fifty, with a childish look of wonder in her face, which came from the way her eyes were set in her head. She was round and pretty and easily excited. She watched her son busy with his tea, watched his every movement with admiration and delight that this wonderful, beautiful young man was her son. She looked at the dear fellow eating strawberries, and she laughed. She seemed to have forgotten how white were his teeth, how brown and wavy his hair, and that his hands were lovely. She was his mother. She was obliged to rise and kiss him occasionally without a smile or any word of excuse. And he said, "Dear little mater, you're prettier than ever," and caressed her fat, small hand. Then she sat down and listened to the laughter and talk in silence.

Emotion was easily roused in her heart ; and emotion caused her to sigh and to smile, and from time to time to lay her knitting down and wipe her eyes, whether they were wet with tears or dry. She knitted continually—with large black needles and specially wound soft wool—blankets for newly born children. She knitted slowly and deliberately, despatch of any kind being foreign to her nature. She knitted as a matron saint might knit who wished to symbolise the true peace of home life. And this solemnity lent the charm of dignity to her actions, the grace of dignity to her life, which might otherwise have seemed insignificant. She adored her husband, worshipped her children, and believed in herself implicitly as the presiding genius of the home. And this she was.

She was simple-minded as a girl, with a girl's complexion and a young girl's laugh, and when she laughed she wrinkled her nose and her cheeks dimpled. She laughed suddenly—a laugh that came like a surprise or a summer sneeze—and suddenly stopped, resuming her knitting and habitual expression of sweet seriousness ; for she never tempted Providence by trying to do two things at the same time. No one could see her laugh and not laugh too, her pleasure was so whole-hearted and infectious.

Her one anxiety was her daughter Marion, who showed signs of being clever, and cleverness in her mind was for a woman akin to wickedness—in some way she did not understand, but felt instinctively to be. Marion read with such assiduity and knitted with such a lack of interest that she was a source of vague alarm to Mrs. Teruel. Her own library consisted of the Holy Bible, the Prayer Book, and a much-used copy of Mrs. Beeton's "Household Companion," which she said was her staff in life. She used to moisten her finger thoughtfully in turning over the leaves of the "Companion": she never did this when reading her Bible, of which she perused a chapter every morning before breakfast, beginning at the first chapter of Genesis, and proceeding in rotation, chapter by chapter, day by day, to the last word of Revelation. Then she began again. The "Housewife's Companion" she understood perfectly, and carried it into the kitchen every morning, and every morning she suggested some new dish to the cook, which the cook—of twenty-one years' standing in her service—firmly proved—her head set back, and her arms akimbo—could not be managed under the existing conditions of the larder, the range, or the kitchen garden.

She had read through the Bible from cover to

cover thirteen times, and had knitted sixty-three soft, woolly blankets for the babies who were helped into existence at the Maternity Hospital in the Portobello Road, London. If these were spread out, she used sometimes to think with pride, they would certainly cover the tennis lawn, and if she were spared to a good old age . . . this hypothesis gave rise to bold visions of the entire field blanketed with the work of her two hands. She aspired to knit a hundred blankets and read through the Bible twenty times before she died—as a cricketer might aspire to make a thousand runs and take a hundred wickets in the same season. No doubt a recording angel kept good count and knew, even though she would be denied the satisfaction of pointing a proud finger to white, convincing rows, and of exclaiming, “Behold the industry of thy handmaiden.” Such a scene as this on the threshold of entry into the future—and even serener—life appealed strongly to her imagination, as a fitting climax to her well-spent days on earth.

But as she watched her son, once more at home, the present joy was sufficient to her, and left no room for speculation, however gentle, for speculation was her mind's nearest approach to melancholy.

There was another person who watched Beverley intently, in silence, and had not the gift of knitting or any artificial cloak to emotion. On the floor, head on paws, with two eyes glowing through grey tufts of shaggy hair, lay Ajax, motionless and happy. He would have been a bob-tailed sheep-dog, if Nature had not adorned him with a tail which a man had docked in puppyhood. He was an odd fellow. Beverley had met him when he was a puppy, irresistibly fluffy, soft and ridiculous, the companion of a neighbouring bailiff's son, who took him seriously even then and educated him to a strenuous, practical life—to retrieve, to know a ferret, to watch, to herd cattle, to be in fact a dog of all work ; achievements he mastered and remembered and treated as accomplishments rather than as a means of livelihood. The bailiff becoming bankrupt left the neighbourhood with his son, and Beverley, passing the farm, recognised an unkempt, uncared-for rascal, as his droll young friend of yore. But he was no longer droll. Six months, during which he had been perpetually chained to an inverted tub, had forced him to be as philosophic as any Diogenes, and possibly dirtier. Ten shillings released him for ever. Scissors and soap and kindness changed his whole appearance. He became passionately

A Boy's Marriage 21

devoted to Beverley, with that entirety of devotion of which the dog alone among earthly creatures—human or not human—has learned the secret.

His beauty was a matter of dispute. One man said he resembled an architectural grotesque; another suggested Thyrsites as a more appropriate name, remembering that Thyrsites was the ugliest Greek who went to Troy—that remark was passed after a heavy shower of rain, and wet hair makes even a lovely woman appear peculiar. But Beverley knew him to be beautiful, and sincerely pitied those who could not appreciate his beauty. Ajax was his attendant spirit and a thorough gentleman, in spite of the farmyard surroundings of his early youth. He had long legs; he had long hair; and the hazel eyes that the grey hair overshadowed showed a capacity for emotion that was unequalled and in itself proved terribly moving. He never barked, and never trotted about the house; he was always silent and walked with a measured step, as one who knew the value of deportment.

Out of doors his manner was less stilted. Sometimes on the sands Beverley would ask him to lie down, and would walk away until Ajax looked a small grey stone in the distance. Then he would beckon him to come; and Ajax

came with yelping shrieks of suppressed excitement at a pace that gave the illusion of a long rope shaken to curves. He could run a hundred and twenty yards in eight and three-quarters seconds, and that too without a pace-maker.

He had enjoyed his life at Oxford, but preferred his life at home.

At last Mr. Teruel got up and said—

“I shouldn't like to hurry you—have another slice of cake—but when you have quite finished your tea—do have a bun—you might come and look round the garden with me.”

“James, remember the dear boy has had a journey,” said his wife.

“All right, Pater, just coming.”

In the garden he took his father's arm and asked, “Do you still smoke that beastly sun-dried?”

“Yes. I've found it good enough for fifteen years.”

Trivialities clear the air, when the air is slightly oppressive with sentiment.

Together they walked round the garden, examining the flowers, inspecting the fruit, smelling the roses; and Beverley wondered at the change that had happened during his eight weeks' absence, the change from the first endeavour of

A Boy's Marriage 23

spring to the full flower and foliage of the summer.

"Things have come on," he remarked.

"You should have seen the daffodils," said his father, referring to a bank which skirted the drive and was entirely covered with large single daffodils.

"They were in bud when I left."

"A sight—a marvellous sight."

"'And dances with the daffodils,'" murmured Beverley, trying to remember the previous lines. "Something about my heart."

"What's that? Oh, poetry! Look here, I've been thinking it would be an improvement to move that shrubbery back into the field and widen the front lawn. What's your opinion? I've waited to consult you, because one day in the ordinary course of things you'll——"

"Don't, Pater," interrupted Beverley, pressing his father's arm.

"Not yet awhile—I'm good for a bit longer. It would open up the view from the lawn; the house is rather shut in, you know. Just think about it."

"Yes. Hullo, I must be off—to meet Eva—I——"

"Right, my boy," said his father, beaming at him; and he continued to smile as he watched

his son run down the drive. "Mind you're not late for dinner," he shouted after him, and Beverley half turned and waved his hand without stopping. Ajax looked round too, and then both disappeared from sight.

"Well, well," said Mr. Teruel to himself on a deliberate sigh of pleasure as he went into the house.

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That evening Marion went to her room early. In spite of herself she was worried about her brother's future happiness, because she felt that he was too undeveloped in character properly to know his own mind. She had been friends with Eva Westake for some years—by force of circumstances rather than by choice—in fact ever since she had come to live with her aunt at the Grange.

Eva was pretty and sweet-tempered ; but for all her sweetness Marion wondered whether she was worthy of her brother's love. She knew Beverley and Eva better than each knew the other, and she could not be as desirous as her father and mother that their marriage should take place so speedily.

She was two years older than Beverley, and up to this point in his life had guided him ; it was

A Boy's Marriage 25

she who had roused and sustained his enthusiasm for poetry and for what was beautiful. She was aware of the ascendancy she had over his mind and was fearful of misusing it, so that he might be caught in the snare set ready for his temperament, of becoming weak and losing his self-reliance. But now she was filled with vague misgivings, for which she was not fully conscious of her motives. She feared that there might be a taint of selfishness in them, that they were due to her dread lest his marriage might raise a barrier between them, and not wholly to a disinterested wish for his happiness. She determined to be silent ; and at once began to doubt whether her silence might not be caused by the knowledge that she would have no rival in little Eva. And so her mind was in a state of perplexity, a state that was foreign to her nature.

That evening her perplexity was given new life by his home-coming ; and she envied her father's joy in his son's happiness. She seemed a sad wiseacre with her forebodings of gloomy possibilities. She would certainly keep them to herself, and not forfeit her brother's confidences, in which she delighted, by any croak of ill omen. But the vague fear of her instinct remained. And after all, she told herself, it was natural enough to dread the issue, when a person dear

to one's heart takes a momentous step in life. That thought was sane and a comfort, and led to pleasant pictures of happiness, upon which her fancy rested for a long time.

She was roused by hearing the crunch of gravel, and looking out of the window she saw Beverley smoking a cigarette, and by his side the grey shadow of Ajax.

"Come up and talk to me, dear," she called out in an undertone.

She would not go into the garden for fear of catching cold in the night air that was damp and cool with dew.

So he came in, and bolting the garden door went upstairs to her room.

She was sitting in a straight-backed chair by the open window in a loose blue dressing-gown, and her hair hung down in waves, nearly touching the floor.

"You look like the Dark Ladye of some old romaunt," he said, kissing her forehead.

"Eva's hair reaches below her knees," she said, twinkling at him.

The picture roused his imagination to ecstasy. All the beautiful mysteries of marriage suddenly became more beautiful and more mysterious. He tried to think how Eva would look wrapped in that encompassing aureole of golden hair :

A Boy's Marriage 27

his fancy whispered to him that she was liege lady of the chaffinches, the empress of the daffodils, and fairy queen of all the butter-cups.

"How lovely she must look," he said, awed by his own imaginings.

Ajax stretched himself on the floor with a sigh of supreme weariness.

"Poor old fellow," said Beverley ; and Ajax beat the stump of his tail slowly on the floor in answer.

"If you're feeling in a specially nice mood, you can sit here," said Marion, moving a chair a little behind her, "and brush my hair while you talk to me ; you must be very gentle."

"Splendid plan ! What jolly soft hair you've got."

"How have you done in 'Schools' ?"

"Oh, scraped a third, I expect ; but don't talk about that. I shall know the worst all too horribly soon."

He went on brushing her hair rhythmically in silence, soothed by the movement into sweet thoughts of a future party in which he would brush golden hair belonging to an even dearer person, loosened from a smaller head, enveloping the daintiest, tiniest form. Marion pretended to purr, and Ajax quietly slept.

After a little he leaned back in his chair, and began to play idly with the soft texture, letting the hair slip through his fingers.

Marion broke in upon his dreams by saying suddenly—

“How do you think father's looking?”

“Awfully well, don't you think so?”

“Yes; but he's been worried lately by something. I wish I knew. One is so powerless. Darling little mother measures him out a dose of Nux Vomica, her panacea for all evils; but I do hate that worried look he sometimes gets.”

“Perhaps it's only a touch of liver.”

“I don't believe it.”

The tone of her voice made him feel that the dreams of his own happiness had rendered him unresponsive.

“You know a woman came here—wanting advice——”

He interrupted her. “Look here, Maid Marion, don't talk as if the old pater were a character in a cheap melodrama. It's perpetually living at home puts these ideas into your head.”

His superior experience of the world swiftly raised him to the level of a patron; and at once he felt far older and wiser than his sister. Marion

A Boy's Marriage 29

smiled. She was not disposed to depreciate her brother ; but her own insight into life, acquired from books and her power of observation, seemed more trustworthy than his, in spite of his wider scope of experience gained by knowledge of life at Oxford. So she smiled and became inscrutable, saying—

“I should like to be father's friend, that's all.”

“Oh well, the mater has lived with him for some twenty odd years, and if she doesn't know him, who does ? ”

“Exactly,” said Marion, musing.

He began to brush her hair again ; then asked, obeying the impulse of sympathy awakened by a sudden misgiving, “Are you happy at home ? ”

“Yes, dear.”

“Always ? ”

“Oh yes. I have bad moods, of course ; but you must never waste sympathy on a megrim. I dread becoming selfish, my life's so easy and comfortable.”

He laughed incredulously.

“You're a fearful darling,” he said, tilting her back in the chair that he might kiss both her cheeks. Then he sat down at her feet, and resting his head on her knee, began to talk softly, as

though to himself, of all the feelings pent up in his heart, of his dreams of love and joy; and they seemed to attain to reality as he strove to put them into words to his sister, whose sympathy he felt. At last he was silent, and the silence drew them closer one to another. Then he went on—

“And I had a wonderful time with Eva to-day. It was my idea, you know, that she should not be at the house—that we should meet in the lane that leads to the sea. She ran to meet me, and as she ran her hat fell back. Oh, you should have seen her hair shining in the sun. We talked, and I read to her. Fancy any one so lovely loving me. Isn't it gloriously beautiful?”

Marion chid herself for wishing that some one more intelligent loved him, and the thought jarred on their harmony.

“It's getting very late, dear, I'm afraid,” she said.

He got up, and Ajax rose at once, yawned, shook himself, and stood waiting.

She put her hands on her brother's shoulders and said—

“I like you to talk to me as you have done to-night. You'll never let anything, anything come between us?”

A Boy's Marriage 31

"Nothing—ever," he answered with conviction.

And he went away, Ajax slowly wagging his tail as he walked out of the room after him.

III

BRUCE arrived ten days after Beverley for a week's rest before settling down to work for his fellowship. At the Teruels' house he used to say he drank the waters of oblivion ; and he bore in his mind how Lethe flowed perilously near to Avernus. He hardly thought of them as a family of living people, their life seemed so strange and unreal and happy, with none of the stress and worry which he connected with life. Certainly it would be a mistake for any one to leave this haven and buffet with the world ; and for a man of Beverley's temperament, which owed its attraction for him to its softness and delicacy, it would be a singularly fatal mistake. Let him curl up and sleep and dream pretty dreams—perhaps put his dreams into words—poetry of a sort, that would be quite pleasant to read ; and let him cultivate that genius of his for intimacy.

Bruce himself had hated his home life, and had always cherished a fierce desire to be quit of

A Boy's Marriage 33

it and free ; but then his own home life had been a thing to hate—in fact most of the homes he knew were hateful. Here, on the contrary, there was that atmosphere of love, of which he had read as a pleasant myth, and which he regarded as a survival from some bygone age, rare and good. So he resolved again to nip in the early bud the growth of discontent which he sometimes noticed in Beverley, but never with any serious alarm.

He found that everything had remained unchanged ; the same peaceful routine occupied each day without hitch or obstruction. He was given the same welcome, the same room, and when he went to dress for dinner he found the same old servant lingering in his room apologetically eager for a little gossip.

All this pleased him exceedingly ; and looking out with a sharp eye for any innovation, he found none and surrendered to the omnipotent peace of the household. He did not, however, notice Marion's twinkle of amusement at his interest in the knitting of woollen blankets ; indeed he did not yet think of her as an individual at all, but merely as a figure in the family pattern.

Holmwood Hall—Bruce considered the name of the house most apt—was in an ideal situation,

quite near to the sea, the joys of which it was not necessary to share with nigger-loving crowds; and yet far enough inland to possess a garden in which everything grew in profusion, shut in by trees, and rich as any old garden in Kent, with a view through the branches of elms over woods right on to the superb line of the Sussex downs, which caught the reflection of the setting sun. Five miles away was the River Arun; and with careful calculation of time and tide a picnic could be arranged on certain days. And two days after Bruce arrived a picnic was arranged.

Mrs. Teruel stayed quietly at home, as the very thought of sitting in a boat all day on any water caused her to feel slightly sick. The same expostulations were made, as Bruce remembered, on his previous visits, and were met with the same unwavering firmness by Mrs. Teruel.

The one-horse wagonette came to the door at half-past ten, and its sombre aspect was soon enlivened to something more festive by its load of gay occupants. Mr. Teruel sat on the box-seat in a large Panama hat and a large bright tie, the picture of contented benevolence. Eva, sitting by his side, felt a pang at his appearance. He was quite vulgarly unlike a coachman, though he intended to drive. She was relieved at her inability to find a blemish in the spotlessness of

A Boy's Marriage 35

her own white dress and gloves. At that time a types-of-beauty series was running through one of the magazines, and she longed to see her own photograph therein, with the inscription "a beautiful English girl" printed neatly below. As she sat on the box, with her feet on a hamper of provisions, she knew that she would choose the hat and costume she was wearing at the moment, and she sighed to think how incomplete that series must remain, and all for lack of a little initiative on the part of Beverley, who did not even possess a camera.

At last the old grey horse started to walk down the drive, paying a proper disregard to Mr. Teruel's cheerful cracking of the whip, and leaving sufficient time for Mrs. Teruel to urge a plaintive warning to be careful in the boat. The papers were already full of accounts of accidents which were invariably the result of carelessness.

Beverley promised to consider editorial feelings, and as they disappeared round a curve in the drive one long howl of disappointment came from Ajax, who had been watching their departure through the window of the smoke-room. Mr. Teruel had refused him permission to join the party—summarily—with the remark trite and final, "A dog in a boat, my boy, is a nuisance."

For the one outlet which Mr. Teruel allowed to his energy was in the arrangement of a pleasure trip. There was nothing more intolerable to him than that a particular attempt at happiness should fail through lack of foresight or an omission. In everyday life he accepted his lot cheerfully and what was put before him without criticism ; but on these special occasions he wrested matters out of the hands of Providence or his wife (whichever it was that he permitted to control his life), and saw that the arrangements were right to the minutest detail.

The boat, ordered in advance, was roomy enough for ten, and the genial boatman assured them that they couldn't "overset her, not if you tried, sir."

"I have no intention of doing so," said Mr. Teruel, fussing with the cushions and seating with which no one was rash enough to interfere.

"Be on the look out for us about six," he cried out as they pulled from the landing-stage, remembering the pace of the current and the consequent difficulty of making the boat-house without the help of the boatman's pole.

"Always here, sir," said the man, grinning at his anxiety.

It was a brilliant windless day in July. The

A Boy's Marriage 37

haze of heat hung shimmering over the meadows, as the boat, aided by a strong tide, went swiftly through the water.

"A day to blister your arms," remarked Mr. Teruel, who always started by stroking, until the Black Rabbit Inn was reached, distant a quarter of a mile, where he stopped for his morning glass of beer, lit a large pipe, and then took to the rudder-lines and criticism.

The trees that came right down to the river, steeply down from the hills in Arundel Park, seemed oppressed by the heat for all their variety of green foliage. They passed a squirrel which they laughed to see run up a great beech. Marion and Beverley wanted to stop in hopes of catching another glimpse of him, and Eva, who felt she was not receiving sufficient attention, said, "Oh, how absurd," a remark which cut Beverley to the heart and made him feel miserable.

Mr. Teruel would not hear of any delay. "Destructive little beasts! Go on—no excuses for slackness."

"Are they destructive as a matter of fact?" asked Bruce, liking Eva to show some spirit, but wondering at her manner of doing so. He accepted her without question as part of the quiet scheme of content, sweet and pretty enough

for any one. Girls he knew nothing of—was frightened of them in consequence ; but he acknowledged the charm of rosy cheeks and long eyelashes from a respectful distance.

“The ruin of young trees, the rascals.” And he told at length the sad history of a friend who had rented a large estate and had neglected to keep down the squirrels, with the result that plantations of young birches had been spoilt and he had been forced to pay unheard-of damages.

“Little monsters of iniquity,” said Marion sleepily from the bows.

“Surely you like squirrels ?” said Beverley earnestly to Eva.

“Oh yes, well enough. Look, there’s a dragon-fly.”

“‘Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky,’” quoted Beverley in delight.

He often took the most trivial remark with a sudden immense seriousness, and a chance word from Eva would stir up great questions in his mind. The unspeakable importance for every man of a love of nature as an unending source of interest and joy came vividly before him on hearing Eva’s objection, and he was as quickly soothed by her notice of the dragon-fly. Nevertheless he had an instant’s doubt as to whether he knew the lovely girl in white, a doubt

scattered by the answering throb in his heart "I love her"—youth's quick instinctive answer—and he became lost in the wonder of the thought that this girl loved him so well that she was willing to become his wife.

"Time, bow, time," growled his father, rousing him to his senses and the fulfilment of his immediate task.

"Time, bow, time—to dream when she's not with you," he smiled to his heart, and to the others he said, "sorry."

Beyond the quarries of Amberley there is a small wood uncared for, with fallen trees that are not carted away, which with the help of cushions make an excellent background during lunch; and here they ate a luncheon which was certainly adequate. Moselle cup attuned the minds of the most prosaic to a poetic level, on which plane Mr. Teruel soon found sleep a relief and a comfort. Not so his son. He led Eva away down the side of the river where the bank shelved into a hollow, shaded by a hawthorn tree from the sun, and speechless with emotion he sat down by her and watched the river flowing softly glittering by. In his happiness all the common beauty, the blue sky, the green fields, the fragrance of the air sweet with the smell of fresh hay, came upon him like a surprise, as if

he had never before realised the true wonder of their loveliness. And Eva by his side caught the reflection of his mood and was silent.

He bent over her, and began to stroke her hand that lay in the sun, and slowly turned the turquoise ring, to which the sun gave a part of the blueness of the sky. He bent his head over her hand and gently kissed each finger. Then he caught her in his arms and held her to him, murmuring, "Eva, my little love, I love you."

She moved from him and smoothed out her frock. After a little she said, looking at the mark on her handkerchief—

"We'd better have the linen marked E. B. T., hadn't we? B. E. T. would look so silly."

"You prosaic darling, what made you think of that now?"

"Oh, these things must be considered, you know."

"'Familiar things made beautiful by love,' that's Shelley; mark them how you please."

"What a lot of poetry you know, dearest. You must teach me to understand it, won't you?"

"Yes, darling, yes," he said, and yielded once again to the strong enchantment of the moving river as it glittered softly by, now dark, now silver bright, flowing on ceaselessly, silently, and

the water fascinated him. He looked into the future and saw dim visions of love and life and beauty and joy, dream-fancies that hovered in his mind a moment, left their fragrance and floated lightly away. He wondered he could have wished ever to leave this peace and beauty and live like an Elizabethan, like some frolic franion. Ah, his father was wise, Bruce was a good friend; if it had not been for them he might have missed so much. "To live as if to live and love were one." That was life more truly than plundering the world for the thrill of adventure. The power to appreciate the simple beauties that environ was better than the fierce pleasure of ambition. He remembered how the great Marlowe had died in a tavern brawl quarrelling over a trull. Where was the glory? And he was sad to think he had been discontented even for a passing moment. Never again would he be guilty of such folly, such wickedness.

Her presence breathed a magic atmosphere that lulled him to the depths of peace; as the river or the sea rippling on the sand, it soothed and conquered his spirit.

The water was flowing noiselessly before him; the fish rose lazily, and the dragon-flies poised, flashed hither and thither, and poised again,

exulting in their swiftness and brilliance ; a small mouse looked out on them and hurried away, and in the distance the tap-tap of a woodpecker at work sounded faintly from the woods.

Suddenly he got up and seized Eva's hand.

"You're glad you are going to be my little wife ?" he asked, and his voice trembled.

"Of course," she answered, laughing ; "what a start you gave me ! I quite thought you were asleep."

He threw his arms round her and kissed her tenderly, passionately.

"Oh don't !" she cried out, laughing still.

"Some one might see us. What a silly you are."

"Am I ?"

"Yes."

She put her arm round his neck.

"I am sorry for girls who haven't a nice lover to make them happy."

"Do I make you happy ?"

"Yes, yes, yes. You're a dear."

He looked into her pretty little face, glowing with blushes and pleasure ; tiny dimples bewitched her cheeks when she smiled, and she was smiling. Her hat was tilted to one side, and a beam of sunlight found its way through the boughs of the hawthorn and danced upon her hair, golden and bright as a buttercup in the sun.

A Boy's Marriage 43

When they rejoined the party for tea, Marion saw the light of joy in her brother's eyes, and she was filled with pleasure at his happiness. They both looked so young, so happy. And youth and joy possess a power than can triumph without effort even over wisdom that is the result of long years of sad experience. They have something in them that is splendidly irresistible, a fine daring and belief in the glory of life.

A fire of sticks was lighted, and tea was made in a billy, and tea in a billy needs the open air and sunshine to make it drinkable. Mr. Teruel had long abandoned all pretence of liking it, and contented himself with whisky and water. The others drank the tea bravely with a relish.

"Looks a little dusky," remarked Mr. Teruel, with kindly interest.

His stricture stirred a storm of dissent in praise of the billy brew.

Marion packed up the tea things, and when she had finished received profuse offers of help from every one. She smiled and said, "It's practically done now, thanks." And every one wondered—and wondered loudly—how they could possibly have allowed her to do it.

They rowed quietly home in almost unbroken silence, as though attending a solemn rite, which

the passing of a glorious day always is, although it may not be largely attended. They had breathed the open air so long, that, like the birds and the trees and the flowers, they came under the spell of the evening.

The river was running swiftly and the sun, low in the sky, shone dazzlingly on the mud of the river bank exposed by the ebb of the tide.

"We shall be home in nice time for dinner," said Mr. Teruel. The remark jarred upon Beverley's finer feelings. He did not think that dinner was the climax to such a day; indeed it seemed to him a sordid waste of time which he might be spending alone with Eva. He resolved to sit in the garden late that evening and watch the stars with her. Perhaps if there was a moon they might walk down to the sea. "Waters on a starry night are beautiful and fair," he remembered.

The genial boatman was in readiness and handed them gaily to the landing.

"The current's running strong now, sir."

"It is," answered Mr. Teruel, and in the tone of a juryman's rider of commendation he said to the others, as they stood round him holding cushions and baskets, "I think the day has been what you might call a success."

"As if it were all over," thought Beverley,

only saving himself from complete dejection by the prospect of his evening walk.

They drove home from Arundel by the higher road, which passes through the woods of Angmering; it is slightly longer than the lower road, but far more beautiful. Mr. Teruel consulted his watch, and finding there was time for the extra ten minutes agreed to the unanimous suggestion. No paltry consideration for scenery would have induced him to encroach upon the customary half-hour which allowed him to dress in a leisurely way for dinner.

As they passed a sign-post with the inscription "To the Dover" pointing towards a lane through woods, Marion said to her brother—

"Do you know that Mrs. Coltney Smith has taken the Dover?"

"No. Has she? How splendid!"

Mrs. Coltney Smith was a society lady who retired into the country to write during the summer.

"Yes, she liked the place so much last year that she has bought the house. I hear she's practically settled in now."

Beverley had met her the previous year in a friend's room at Oxford, and found she knew the country round his home and was going to spend the summer there. So he called on her and

liked her exceedingly because she had the halo of having written novels and because she had listened with evident interest to certain verses and stories which he himself had written. Why he had ever found courage to tell her he wrote, or to read her his work, he never understood. Perhaps Mrs. Coltney Smith did. She knew most things.

"I shall go and see her," said Beverley.

"Of course you must. Did you meet her, Mr. Bruce?"

"Smart women aren't quite in my line."

"Yes. But she's an awfully good sort besides," said Beverley.

A sudden wish came to Marion that her brother might see this clever woman very often. Any new influence would widen his outlook and be good for him. Mrs. Coltney Smith stimulated him to write, and Marion in her heart nursed the hope that her brother might one day do something really good. But he was without the strength or the self-confidence to make a serious effort to begin; and she knew that the first step must be an ordeal, an agony.

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That evening Beverley took his walk with Eva. He had imagined the joy of it, but he

found that the reality far surpassed his imaginings in the glory of its delight. His lady had the gift of silence ; she never desired to express what she felt ; so Beverley's imagination had full scope. Ajax went too and thought it a wearisome walk. For once he sank to the level of the commonplace and wished that he was comfortably at home.

IV

BRUCE dreamed on through his visit at Holmwood Hall, but as the dream progressed the figure of Marion Teruel seemed to become gradually more distinct. She began to assume the proportions of a living person. His attitude towards Beverley in his home surroundings differed from his attitude towards the other members of the household ; it was as though he and Beverley had come from Oxford to enjoy the same dream, each in his own way.

He found himself as loath to leave as most people are to rise in the early morning, and the reasons for doing so appeared equally arbitrary to his slumber-encumbered intelligence. But leave he eventually did, and on the day he had arranged for his departure ; for there seemed wafted in upon him from a distant sphere some faint spiritual rumour of an idea about will-power, a rumour faint but sufficient.

One incident of his stay was especially dream-worthy ; it was so eminently serious and so

eminently absurd—to wit, the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of the bungalow. Something in Bruce impelled him to deliver a moving speech on that occasion, a speech of pathos which brought tears to the eyes of Mrs. Teruel and lumps to the throats of the faithful servants. He spoke earnestly about friendship (while he hoped he would not waken), impressively about marriage (while that hope increased in force), and at the conclusion, when he clasped hands fervently with Mr. Teruel, one eye twinkled and the other eye wept. He was sure that he had risen to the sublime until a puzzled look from Marion settled him at the ridiculous, and he succumbed to the comfort of the reflection how closely the two approximate. He was sincere in so far as he felt all that he said, though his fluency was too esoteric to be natural. He did not know at the time whether he was inspired or possessed; afterwards he was filled with the shame of a wise man who has perpetrated a solecism—of a sane man who has lapsed.

He left early one Saturday morning that he might start work by Monday in rooms he had taken at Oxford.

“A post card the day before you arrive is all that’s required, you know. Always glad to put

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50 A Boy's Marriage

you up. Mustn't overdo it. Come down for a change at any time," said Mr. Teruel.

"It's really good of you."

"No, no, no."

"Such a real friend as you've been, and are, to my son is always more than welcome," urged Mrs. Teruel, and Bruce was pleased and uncomfortable. Beverley noticed his discomfort, and with a look that begged him to take his mother's profusion in the right spirit, said—

"Dear old chap, mind you do come."

To which Bruce answered as he climbed into the trap by Beverley's side, "I will," with emphasis, "as though I were responding," he thought, "at my own marriage service, *ὁ μὴ γένοιτο* yet awhile."

At the station was Mrs. Coltney Smith, who immediately recognised Beverley, though she had not seen him for a year, and at once made apologies for not having called at Holmwood Hall.

"I am sure Mrs. Teruel will understand. I am in the country to work, to escape from social duties. What a dear dog, with his solemn hairy face."

Beverley assured her his mother would understand.

"I'm so pleased to see you again. Come to

tea about four on Monday. I need not stand upon ceremony with you, need I? we're fellow-artists, you see: and your work interests me. I have made that damp old house so attractive—you'll see it—but don't let me keep you from your friend any longer."

Beverley blushed and smiled and withdrew.

"Who's that?" asked Bruce. He had an instinctive dislike for well-dressed women, classing them all, with a sneer, as fashionable: a dislike made up of alarm and disapprobation in equal parts. There seemed something unnatural in a woman who was not diffident, something almost immodest in a woman who quietly realised her own attraction as an asset in life and used it for what it was worth. He realised it was worth much. That, however, did not tend to allay the harshness of his judgment.

Beverley told him her name, adding, "She writes, you know."

"Smart trash, I suppose?"

"Not as bad as that."

The train arrived at that moment and prevented Bruce from saying more on the subject. If the question had been put to him whether women should look attractive, he would have answered at once that they should. Further,

ought they to know and utilise their attractions? An indignant denial. Then should they be fools? Of course not. His logic sometimes forsook him: he knew much philosophy, but he was not a philosopher.

The railway station thoroughly roused Bruce to life, and made him impatient to be off and up and doing. He was glad when the train steamed away with him—to work out his career. Beverley thought he could distinguish the air of the “Priests’ March,” and turning away with a smile on his face, he sauntered to the trap and drove back to his peaceful existence.

He found his father meditating over the asparagus bed, which had flourished unusually well that year. He looked at it fondly, as a man looks at a friend who has done him a good turn unexpectedly, while he reflects that, after all, there is good in human nature.

He slowly turned his head as Beverley came towards him.

“Gone off all right—your pal?”

“Yes.”

And they regarded the soft feathery stuff in silence.

Then Mr. Teruel removed his pipe from his mouth, and pressing down the ash with his little finger, said—

"I want a word with you on business some time to-day."

"Then let's go into your own room now."

"Well, there is something to be said for that."

Mr. Teruel was always deliberate. Fretfulness or bustle he could hardly tolerate. He took full value out of every detail in his daily life, and so enjoyed each detail, however unimportant. In this way he vested the trivial with significance; and if this comprises the art of life, he was a consummate artist. Perhaps it was this reverence for details which caused him never to interfere with household arrangements, regarding them as outside his province—as the almost sacred property of another; or it may have been his habitual indolence.

Beverley took his father's arm and they went into the library.

There were some long moments of uneasy silence, which Beverley felt more acutely than his father, for sympathy was added to his other feelings. Had Bruce been present, he would certainly have been touched and tickled—tickled by the quaint method in their emotion, and touched by their mutual love. But Beverley was thanking God with his whole heart that he had such a dear father.

54 A Boy's Marriage

At last Mr. Teruel made a supreme effort and began—

“It's not exactly business I wanted to speak to you about : it's—well—there are some things a father finds it difficult to talk over with his son. So you must try and have confidence in me, as I have faith in you—faith—I mean belief—that I think honestly your marriage is the right thing for you. I—it's difficult for me to say what I mean : it's not my habit to talk of matters which I feel strongly about—I hate effusion—and well—of course ordinarily speaking the world's point of view is against——”

He was about to say “innocence,” but could not.

Beverley sat lightly holding his knee and gazing at the shape of the fern in the fireplace, deeply moved by his father's effort to show that he was his friend. He felt the atmosphere of affection, felt that he was nearer to his father than ever before, so that what his father was actually saying became relatively of minor importance. Without looking up he said musingly—

“But the world's point of view has nothing to do with me. ‘And leave the troop which errs and which reproves, And come and be my guest, for I am love's.’ That's not quite

how you'd put it ; but that's what you really mean."

That was not at all what Mr. Teruel meant ; but the tone of his son's voice enabled him to speak with greater ease.

"I don't want to rush you into marriage : I merely give you my opinion that it is the best thing you can do for your own happiness. Do you see ? And of course it would be very pleasant for me to have you near. . . . I have managed to make a certain amount of money ; and I like to think you can do as you like : work if you want to or not. You'll never play fast and loose. You've many interests—flowers and tennis and so on—and books—you write a bit yourself, don't you ? Ah, I thought so—well, you can go to the office or not, as you like. I think perhaps you should get the hang of it. But I tell you that's as you like. All I want is that you should be happy and near me. Be a country gentleman. I never did believe that a sane man is saner because he works eight hours a day making money he doesn't want. Of course for one of these restless, stupid beggars who care for nothing but things they shouldn't, solid drudgery is necessary. You're not that sort. So you can do as you please. . . . That's really all I wanted to say."

"I sometimes feel I may become lazy, half alive through too much happiness."

"Nonsense, my boy, sheer nonsense. Of course you'll feel a bit strange at the thought of being married—all men do—as for myself—I . . ."

Mr. Teruel seemed not to hear Beverley's remonstrance. He leaned back in his chair grasping the arms. The memories this talk with his son aroused within him were intensely vivid ; and they contained that mingling of sorrow and pleasure that all memories contain. A chance word may serve to conjure up events for years forgotten—or lazily remembered with a sigh as past experience—as with a magic touch to present life ; and a man for the moment almost ceases to be the slave of "Time the leveller" and to his own dolour or delight lives again, as Mr. Teruel lived again in spite of his son's presence, a living proof of Time's power.

Both were silent. The young man was trying to imagine the full joy that awaited him in the future ; the old man was thinking of the days that were gone. A silent drama of common occurrence, common as the dusk of evening or the dusk of morning and no less memorable.

Mr. Teruel's youth had been spent in London,

where he lived in rooms and had many friends—mostly medical students, amongst whom he was the leading spirit. He was generally hard up, but vitality laughs at neediness and he enjoyed himself. Every one liked him. He possessed that subtle quality of charm which knows no definition and may be the gift of a wicked fairy or a good, its effects are so varying. He had the faculty for employing—quite unconsciously—other people's brains to solve his own difficulties; not that he was wholly devoid of strength; he was able to act upon advice, and he was never required to act upon his own initiative. He allowed others to help him: and in that perhaps lay part of the secret of his charm.

Three years he lodged in London, and then he met a man of wealth and a land agency business in Brighton, who thought he was a lad of mettle, took him into the business, and finally into partnership, where he flourished and married his partner's only daughter. His work was not strenuous, it consisted for the most part of being honest and agreeable, and neither duties were difficult to him. Comfort and country air put the finishing touches to his good health and humour. Accordingly, soon after his marriage, his mind went as it were to bed, turned from

side to side in momentary uneasiness, found the easiest position, sighed, yawned, and slept, slept like a child without stirring. Possibly he would have developed into rather a fine fellow, if life had not thus lulled him in her arms to a drowsy indolence. He had little of his mother's Spanish blood in him.

He did not forget his friends, but they scattered and gradually dropped out of his life. He still heard from the man with whom he had lodged—a medical student who had introduced him to the other medicals. His name was Roger Calderon and he had become an army doctor in India. Their rooms had been over a confectioner's shop in East Street, kept by a French woman, Margot Bavier, and her daughter Stephanie. Stephanie fell in love with him and became his mistress and guardian angel, which may appear a strange contrast ; but she was a strange woman, practical and sane, with a character almost more vigorous than that of her mother. She would not listen to his wish to marry her, and when she heard of the offer to enter the business in Brighton, she forced him to accept it and to close his relations with herself, which, she said, must end one day and had better end now of their own accord. She kept her sadness hidden in her heart. He

was not particularly selfish ; but he was clay in her hands, and soon—not heartlessly soon—he saw how wise she had been, and accepted the inevitable without much vain regret. Her influence over him had been extraordinary, and his parting with her had been the only painful incident in his life. He knew she could have ruined him ; he also knew that instead of ruining him she had made him. When he married he gave his wife as much love as is compatible with comfort and propriety ; and both were contented. But he never lost sight of Stephanie. She had married a Frenchman, Martin Dartené, who owned a small restaurant. From time to time he heard how they were getting on. Her letters contained no reproach, no regret, no reference to the past ; but merely praise of her husband and an account of her various doings.

One brought news of the birth of a child, another of the death of her mother. And quite recently, just before Beverley returned from Oxford, he had heard that she was a widow, that her husband had left her a little money, and that she wanted his advice. Her child was settled in service, and there was a hint of loneliness which touched him. He longed to help her, and felt that it would be an insult to send

her money. He resolved to take a house in Littlehampton where she could make her living by letting apartments and where her daughter could live with her. And this scheme he was arranging.

As he recalled this incident of his youth, there came vividly before his mind the disasters that might happen to Beverley if he fell into the hands of an unscrupulous woman. So he was glad that his son wished to marry, and glad that he was able to provide the means. He did not regret that episode now ; but he was afraid that Fortune might not smile upon his son in as kindly a way as she had smiled upon him. He had confidence in Beverley. He was fonder of him than fathers usually are of their sons ; but he knew him in the parental manner, and looked upon his enthusiasm for poetry as a pleasant vagary of youth, that was surface deep and quite unimportant. Doubtless there was truth in this view ; but a vital quality underlay the enthusiasm which it would have been wise to take into account ; and that quality was the artistic temperament, inherited doubtless from some Spanish ancestor.

At last Mr. Teruel roused himself and pulled out his watch.

“Ten to eleven—well, well, just ring for a

A Boy's Marriage 61

glass of ale. A bit early—but emotion in the morning is a most unusual—most painful thing.”

Beverley laughed and rang the bell.

V

ON Monday Beverley walked over the fields by the Decoy Pond to the Dover to call on Mrs. Coltney Smith. He suggested to Eva that she should come with him, but she would not hear of such a thing. She said that she had not been asked and was much too shy, and thought to herself that she had no dress sufficiently smart to create the right impression. Patronage of any kind she disliked, and this woman's patronage would be particularly unpleasant, because she was, what Eva aspired to be—smart. So Beverley went alone and with reluctance, feeling what a fool he had been not to say that he had an engagement.

As he was starting, Marion called out to him, "Look out for me by the Decoy, I'll come and meet you there."

"Do, that'll be splendid."

The Dover was an old house three miles inland, set in the midst of woods, lonely and sheltered. Woods surrounded the house on

every side but one, which looked over the road—itsself sparsely edged with young oak trees—on to a sloping field of grass—then upon more woods rising directly up to the distant hills, with here and there a green sweep of meadowland. The garden was tiny and prosperous, full of roses and honeysuckle. The lawn was just large enough to have tea on, Mrs. Coltney Smith said.

She was standing by the gate when he arrived, holding a leather leash.

"I am delighted you've come. Would you mind fastening your dog to that post? He might be discourteous to Farina. Farina is my blue Persian, who takes tea with me. A generic antipathy—your dog is a dear, but—Ah, do you see?"

At that moment Farina walked out of a French window and Ajax caught sight of her. He strained at the leash until Beverley said, "Lie down!" and he lay down, keeping a bright eye riveted on the cat. "Never mind, old fellow," said his master.

He followed Mrs. Coltney Smith on to the lawn, wondering at her appearance. There was something different about her to the other women he knew. Was it due to her clothes or the way she wore them? he asked himself, not having

learned the full meaning of the French word *bien soignée*, nor the importance of the invisible in a woman's dress. Eva had a dress of that soft muslin stuff and looked a darling in it. What was the difference? Age? Not entirely. Nor was it birth, nor grace—no one could walk better than Eva; any comparison between them was absurd: might as well compare a buttercup to a carnation—a dryad of the woods to a goddess—pooh! no—to a society woman.

He felt hostile and self-conscious; also he was hot and thirsty.

Basket chairs were on the lawn, low and filled with cushions. They sat down in the shade and a maid brought out a tumbler of hock and seltzer.

"A cool drink—after your walk." There was a suggestion of an apology in her voice.

"Oh, that's—thanks awfully—it's just——" stammered Beverley, and drank to hide his confusion and pleased surprise. Then he felt better.

"What made you think of that?" he asked.

"Men sometimes like a long, cool drink on a hot day, I have found." He liked the way she said "men." Her eyes smiled as she added, "I wasn't wrong?" She lit a cigarette and laughed as she threw away the match.

"Given reasonably fine weather, you know, this place is admirable : exactly what I want. You see I come here to work. I must be alone to work. After the hurry and rush of London—the ceaseless round of society—I require absolute peace. Then I have friends down for week-ends. You see—people I am fond of. They stimulate me to work ; and I'm so glad to be alone again after they have gone. Friends' husbands always bore me ; and friends' wives are—well—all women are cats."

"I don't think so," said Beverley abruptly.

"Of course you don't—yet. Ah, here's tea. That's one thing even an advanced woman can do : pour out tea. Most domestic and suitable." She put her chin down into the lace round her neck. "A man with a teapot in his hand invariably looks a fool."

And Beverley thought angrily that his tea-parties at Oxford had always been successful.

She poured out the tea and filled a special saucer with cream for Farina. Beverley turned his head to look at Ajax, who sat up and held out his paw. There was no humility or reproach in his gesture : it was as though he said, "You're not the man I took you for if you don't leave that little cat and come to press my paw."

F

"Look at the old chap; let me take him a piece of bread and butter."

"Yes, do. He's behaving like an archangel."

"He's mopped that up all right," said Beverley as he sat down again.

"He's what?" she laughed.

"I mean eaten."

He began to feel at his ease and pleased that he had come. After all she was interesting.

"May I have a pipe?"

"Why yes, of course."

He filled his briar and smoked contentedly.

Then Mrs. Coltney Smith said, "Now tell me, what have you been doing all this time? Have you done any more work? I am most anxious to know. The Cenotaph interested me so much."

She spoke as though she had been waiting impatiently all the year to hear more about Beverley's work. This delighted him.

"Fancy your remembering the name of my story."

"Of course. It impressed me. What else have you done?"

"Oh well—I—hardly anything—I thought of starting a novel—but——"

"Tell me about it."

"I was going to call it The Triumph of Joy

—I sketched bits of it out—but it won't come to anything. It's such cheek my thinking I could write a novel."

"Nonsense. From the little I've seen of your work I am quite sure you have more than average ability."

"Besides I've been reading a lot of poetry, Shelley especially, and—well—I'm engaged to be married," he blurted out for some reason peculiarly his own.

"What—do you mean to say——" she exclaimed; then she checked herself, and in her usual voice went on, "Yes, of course Shelley is delightful: he is the poet of the very young: the music of his lyrics—wonderful—quite wonderful; and poetry is just that—the music of words. Shelley does not cumber his lines with ideas—pure music—he soars you see; an ineffectual angel. I am not in close sympathy with Matthew Arnold, but he's right there. But for music Shelley is incomparable. A great artist in the use of words, you see. Personally I could never read him. Poetry means little or nothing to me, poetry never moves me like prose."

And she was thinking, "Poor boy, with his temperament too, what a pity, what a pity."

Beverley was roused to a state of aggressive

excitement, as though he had heard a friend's name traduced.

"Why do you talk like that about poetry? That cold-blooded pedant, Matthew Arnold! If you knew what Shelley meant to me, what I owe to his poetry: all the beauty of life—why—he is a religion—of course there's music, but there's a great deal more as well."

He started from his chair and paced up and down in front of her. Her interest was certainly not assumed; perhaps it was more for the enthusiasm of the boy than for the actual wisdom of what he said.

"He shows what life is without love, and how love transforms life. *I may be very young, but I know what love means. And you laugh at me because I am engaged; if you knew more, you would understand. Of course in society, leading the life you do, love is a joke; but it's real to me; I tell you it's my whole life. And what kind of life is yours? Just killing time and yourself rushing about among people until you're so sick of them you have to be absolutely alone. You get no good from people or from yourself. There's no room for human sympathy or love. Of course you're cynical. Besides, it's smart. Love is everything to me. It's my life and I'm not ashamed."

A Boy's Marriage 69

Mrs. Coltney Smith grew more interested as he became more personal and incoherent. She was not offended at his rudeness. She liked him for his obvious sincerity and enthusiasm ; and very easily she pardoned his ignorance, and wondered at the touch of truth in what he said.

"I don't laugh at you. Perhaps there's no place for emotion in some people's lives."

"Emotion, what's that to do with love ? Because they don't make room. They're afraid of being thought sentimental, being laughed at. Of course, if you think only of clothes and looking smart and attracting men, you can never know what love is. I don't mean you. I mean people. I know I'm utterly rude. I can't help it—I get keen and——"

Suddenly Beverley saw a young man talking and gesticulating wildly to a perfectly dressed lady with an interested look upon her face. Immediately he blushed and became confused.

"Why do you look at me like that ?" he asked.

"I was thinking how much you will have to suffer." For a moment the mask fell from her face and there was a look in her eyes which made Beverley yearn to show her love's glorious place in life, that she might see it clearly with the convincing clearness of his own vision.

The look vanished. She took a cigarette and said—

“Well, I dare say you’re right. I often think the modern woman is like the little girl who was so clever she could only say her alphabet backwards ; so she never learnt to read.”

Then she leaned forward and said in a somewhat different voice, “You know all intense faith carries conviction.”

She lifted Farina on to her knee and began to rub gently behind her ear with one finger.

“I must go now,” said Beverley.

As he shook her hand he said, getting very red—

“I wish you’d let me know you—really I mean.”

“Ah, my dear boy,” she looked sad. Then she rose and added laughing, “Wiser not to come too near the glow, lest you see the worm. But write your book—in your spare moments.”

“Don’t laugh at me ! You must meet Eva, my——” he stopped : “fiancée” seemed a ridiculous word.

“I should like to extremely.”

“You know we shall live here. Father’s building us a little house near home, and it’s rather nice for me to be going to live among all the people I love, isn’t it ?”

"Yes," she said. Looking at his sensitive face, aglow with youth and happiness, she shuddered to think what tricks Fate could play.

"Has he strength?" she wondered.

Aloud to him, "Well, good-bye for the present."

He walked away and she sat until the sun began to set, pondering over the different ways in which Life teaches men and women her strange lesson—wrings their hearts with agony to teach them—and who among men and women could say they had learned their lesson rightly? What was the essential to attain which it was worth while sacrificing all else? Many suggestions, but no answer came. Was she merely watching life, as a comedy in which she had no part? Well, the comedy was still interesting.

Beverley walked gaily on through the woods, delighted with his visit and eager to meet Marion at the Decoy Pond and tell her all about it. What a glorious evening it was! and what a curious woman was Mrs. Coltney Smith, a splendid good sort really. He wondered what her husband was like and why she did not read poetry, though she wrote. She must like the country or she would not have taken the Dover. And those books of hers. How could she be cynical, how could any one be cynical, living in

the midst of such beauty? And she came into the country to find leisure to write horrible books like that. She was an odd mixture.

He came to a short, steep hill and raced down it for sheer delight, which Ajax appreciated. He was young and his heart was full of joy, and he longed that every one with whom he came in contact should share the joy in his heart. He saw that Mrs. Coltney Smith was sad—instinctively he realised her sadness and at once he wanted to show her the glorious joy of life. Without hesitation, without knowledge—for wasn't it only necessary for him to make her see things from his standpoint? And then—oh, if she would only let him!

He reached a gate, latched and fastened with a chain looped over the post. He lifted the chain; then he laughed and put the chain in its place again, took three steps back and vaulted over. He turned and watched Ajax scrambling over the second bar. When his front legs were on the ground and his back legs hoisted, Beverley said, "Stay there," and walked away. Ajax remained obediently where he was. Pity was soon taken on his plight; he was called and bowled over and over in the grass by the roadside to the words of apology, "Was it a shame, then?" And they continued their walk, very soon reach-

A Boy's Marriage 73

ing the Decoy Pond, where he found Marion reading and listening to the moorhens, the little musicians who play the low-toned violas in the birds' orchestra. To her he described his visit in detail, as they walked home together, told her about Farina, the thoughtful provision of hock, his denunciation, the mysterious power by which she drew him on to talk, and ended by saying—

“You know for all her splendour she's lonely and sad underneath. I simply know it. There must be something wrong in her life. She's rich and can do what she likes, and——”

“How do you know, dear?”

“Oh it's obvious, and why can't she manage to be happy?”

“Perhaps she is.”

“Just look at the colour in the sky. I know her better than you think. Hullo—look at Ajax. After him, boy!” They were passing through a meadow, and Ajax had started a rabbit in a clump of grass and gave full tongue as he ran. The rabbit, however, was in his own field and reached his burrow in safety.

“Father walked with me as far as the railway crossing. You remember the woman whose visit I thought worried him; well, he told me about her. When he lived in London, she was the landlady's daughter. She's just lost her husband,

and he's arranged that she should keep a lodging-house in Littlehampton. She makes wonderful ginger-snaps, he says.

"Isn't it just like the old Pater? He never forgets any one. My hat! Talk of the devil and there he is.

Oh how then was the devil dressed?
Oh he was dressed in his Sunday best;
His coat was red and his breeches were blue,
And there was a hole where his tail came through,"

sang Beverley. "What's up, Pater?"

There was mystery in his father's face, and yet greater mystery in the unwonted infringement of all his habits in taking a walk at this hour.

"Perhaps you'll quote a little less, now you're ploughed."

"Rot. Am I? Don't rag! I don't believe it."

"See for yourself, then." He slowly unfolded a telegram, which he handed to Beverley. It contained terse and excellent news: "Passed second class."

Mr. Teruel put his arm round his son and said, "I am delighted, my dear boy."

Marion, reading the telegram over his other shoulder, kissed his cheek and was silent.

VI

IMPERCEPTIBLY the summer passed away with the quiet swiftness of happy days ; and Beverley gave no thought of regret to their swift passing, for he was too buoyantly happy to be conscious of his happiness and too continuously happy to doubt the eternity of its duration. There was none of that quick despair which in the very hour of joy stabs into the heart of one who has known misery ; that wild longing to prolong the moment, born of knowledge that all things end, that fear that all the sweetness may turn suddenly to ashes ; thoughts which make delight so poignant that it becomes well-nigh insufferable. Not that Beverley was lacking in imagination : far from it, but his imagination helped him to soar in the heavens rather than to scrutinise the earth for pitfalls. He had supreme faith in life, unquestioning and untried : for he was young and Time was at present his friend.

Indeed there seemed an agreement among the angels to see that his happiness was thwarted in no way. August brought a letter from Bruce,

saying that he had taken a "first," followed soon after by news that he was elected to a fellowship; and Beverley revelled in delight at his friend's success. The lady of the Dover had behaved charmingly when they called and had quite won Eva's heart. She more often dropped the mask she wore for the world in his company, and one memorable day she said that their friendship meant much to her, more perhaps than he realised. A poem of his was accepted by a magazine, and the first chapter of his novel was finished and approved by Marion. Even in the smallest matters his good fortune never left him; he made more runs at cricket than he had done before, and took more wickets.

And above all, there shone the triumphant fact of his love, which coloured all with its ethereal rosy light. Eva became more adorable to him each day: she seemed to grow more lovely to his fancy: he tried to find some fault in her, but could not.

The nearest approach to that was when one day, making a great effort of self-control, he spoke judicially of her to Marion.

- "She is a most suitable person really, to be my wife; her beautiful calmness will balance all my keenness and——Don't you think so, seriously I mean?"

A Boy's Marriage 77

To which Marion answered impulsively, "Oh, you are a dear."

This took place when they were reading together Taine's *History of English Literature*, that they might improve their French and continue their reading-parties. For Marion had practically read the school with him. She knew that Beverley could be made to do anything by an appeal to his affections, and this appeal she had made with great tact, so that while she appeared to be learning from him, she was in reality keeping him up to the mark. It was for her sake that he never missed a lecture and took full notes that she might have the benefit of them. In the vacations they went over these notes and his essays together, and he learned much from their discussions : she stimulated his interests and made him accurate—indeed, helped him in his work even more successfully than his tutor at Oxford, though he was a don of dons. Beverley, owing to his nature, cared for literature chiefly in so far as it appealed to his emotions ; he suffered with Hamlet, wept with Othello, loved with Romeo. Marion had the critical faculty also : she was as deeply interested in the development of the artist's genius, seen in his method of treatment, as she was in the characters themselves. She read Taine to

him, and he read *François le Champi* and *La petite Fadette* to her. Thus many mornings of September were passed—very pleasant mornings—though Eva was excluded from the party, because Beverley would not allow his love to interfere with his relations with his sister. Moreover, Eva was her aunt's right hand, and was occupied with the household duties during the morning.

And so the days of summer passed away, and autumn spread her enchantment over the country, bewitching first the tender leaves of the chestnuts and the clinging creepers to don her tinted dress until at last the upright poplars fell victims to her charm. There was changing of apparel for autumn's pageant before the long sleep of winter, that afterwards the trees might waken on spring's morning to renewed freshness and beauty. The ivy and the evergreens alone retained their fustian unabashed and would not conform to autumn's gay demands. Nature's punishment for their nonconformity is that they shall live for ever in their monotonous own drab green.

In October Beverley started to go to his father's office in Brighton, three days a week, so that he might get what Mr. Teruel called "the hang" of the work, and that he might continue his fencing,

at which he was becoming proficient when he left Oxford. No one took his office-work with great seriousness except himself, and his own interest began to flag as the winter brought Christmas near. The routine began to pall, for he soon realised that his work was of no great use, and that if he were absent all would go on as well, if not better, than if he were present. So he told his father one morning that, on turning things over in his mind, he had come to the conclusion that now he had the hang of office-work he did not see much point in continuing.

"That's exactly as you like, my boy. As I said, if I remember rightly, some time back."

That settled the matter, and in January the office saw him no more.

About this time the familiar figure of his mother began to appear to him in a new light. He became conscious for the first time how much the family unison was due to her quiet interest, which before he never thought about, but accepted as a matter of course. Perhaps it was the feeling that a change was at hand (a trivial change, he assured himself) as he watched the gradual development of the small house at the far end of the garden which in a short time would be his home. But he was more tender in his behaviour to his mother, and he thought of many little

things which he could do to give her pleasure. He was angry with himself that he had ever been able to laugh at her passion for knitting and other foibles which now possessed for him an almost holy significance. He thought of the agony she had suffered in bringing him into the world, and the sacred beauty of motherhood filled him with awe as he thought of his own mother. At these moments the glad rush of happiness was checked within him, and a fear and a fresh wonder awoke in his heart. The hurrying, rushing stream flows sometimes peacefully through smooth places—the same stream, but in a still, deep channel.

And all the while the building of the new house was going on apace, and as the winter progressed the walls rose, the roof was put on, the ceilings, the woodwork, the fireplaces—all were complete. Then there was a journey to London for furniture and carpets, and a journey to Oxford for old oak cupboards and bookcases. The first days of spring saw the house furnished and ready; the workmen only left behind the trappings of their well-nailed boots, and even these signs of construction were not long in disappearing.

The wedding was fixed for the first week of May. After much discussion they had decided to spend the honeymoon in Cornwall, and Mr.

A Boy's Marriage 81

Teruel had gone to Penzance to choose the most comfortable set of rooms in the hotel. At last nothing remained but to await the arrival of the momentous day.

Bruce was coming from Oxford to officiate as best man. The day of the marriage was Wednesday, and he was coming on Monday in the same train by which Beverley had travelled when he left Oxford.

That afternoon Beverley went alone to his house: he smiled as he let himself in with his own key. The stove had been burning for a week, and there was no chill of an uninhabited house to meet him. He shut the door without making any noise and then he wiped Ajax's paws, one by one, on the mat, a process to which Ajax was well used, and sat down on the low sofa in the hall. The stillness and mystery enchanted him; and a strange feeling of exaltation came upon him as he sat there alone in his own home. Many times he had been there with Eva, or with his mother, or with Marion, but never before alone.

"You're going to live here, boy," he said. Ajax's answer was to put his chin on Beverley's knee and look up into his face.

Beverley got up and went into each room in turn; he visited the dining-room, the drawing-

room, and his study, where his books and pictures already were. Then he turned to go upstairs, but his foot on the lowest stair, he stopped and hesitated . . . a far-away look came into his eyes . . . he went back into the study, where he sat down and lighted a cigarette.

Intently he watched the smoke curl up into the room and spread into a grey cloud by the ceiling, then catch the draught and swirl like some living thing through the casement window, out into the bright sunshine, which was making the birds sing madly. Gradually an impelling ecstasy filled his mind—the foretaste of the great mysterious joy that was waiting for him. It thrilled his soul and body : his heart beat throbbingly ; a clear light shone in his eyes ; his imagination brooded on that sovereign joy wrapped in the splendid shroud of the unknown, when, unashamed, untroubled by bad memories, he would learn the great secret of passion, “and the deep calls to the deep and no one hears but I.” Gone was the need for restraint, gone all sad farewells : she would be his—supremely his—for ever : he would be with her through the long hours of darkness, and wake at dawn to find her sleeping by his side, and he would lean over and kiss her white forehead while she slept : she would open her eyes for a moment, smile at

him, and close them again in sleep. Then he would fold his arms softly round her—so softly, not to waken her—and lay his head upon her breast, and she would sigh and nestle to him. Always, always she would be near him—glad to be near him, finding delight in his presence even as he found delight in her presence, and their love would become each day more profound, would gain beauty each day, would gain sweetness: their joy would be never-ending and complete in its sincerity and loveliness. No cloud would come between them. What cloud could find its way to their horizon of shining sky?

A chance cynicism he had heard came into his mind—"The test of a wife is breakfast." Good God, he thought, with fury of resentment, how petty, how disgusting! What could that fool know of love like his—love that made his life's aim to achieve his wife's happiness? It was blasphemy, foul blasphemy! The thought was a degradation!

But soon his whole heart yearned with sadness to think that men and women were living on the earth who had never known the true beauty of love, and the sadness took away the anger from his heart. And why should he of all men possess this treasure, and know the value of his possession? There were men, and

84 A Boy's Marriage

women too, who loved and whose love was not returned—there were men who never loved, women whom no one loved. Oh, he would spend his life in proving his worthiness, in showing that he was grateful for the love that was bestowed upon him. “To wipe salt tears from the worn cheek of woe”; he with his abundant joy would shed the warmth of happiness around him wherever he went, would comfort the sad, would put new life into the downcast, new hope into the discouraged ; and from the depth of his soul he prayed that the good gift of sympathy might be his.

VII

SOME days elapsed after the postcard of safe arrival—before a letter came from Beverley, and then the letter was short, describing the splendour of the cliffs and a rough sea which he had watched, concluding, “Eva is well and joins with me in sending love to all.”

Marion was uneasy at the tone of the letter, which was lacking in the gusto and joy which pervaded his letters usually, and she was not happy in spite of her father's smile and remark that he would have no time for letter-writing. The shortness did not trouble her : the restraint and hardness did. But then she had been feeling sad for some weeks as the marriage drew nearer ; she knew that now there would be an integral part of her brother's life which must of necessity remain a closed book to her ; and no doubt her fears were the direct outcome of this sadness, made more vivid by his actual departure. All this she told herself, but the sadness did not pass away at once and a certain feeling of loneliness remained.

She paid special attention to Ajax, who had been left in her charge, and felt thankful that Eva's aunt had taken advantage of her niece's wedding to spend the spring in Italy. It was something that she was spared the duty of comforting her.

Mrs. Teruel wiped her eyes often at this period while she knitted, and there were tears in her eyes ; it was quite fitting there should be.

A distraction came to the family in Mr. Teruel's excitement at receiving a letter from Roger Calderon—postmark London—saying that he intended to live in England and would like to stay with his old friend, if his old friend could have him. Mr. Teruel chuckled to himself a good deal that morning at breakfast and at last said—

"I'll send a telegram—answer prepaid—I think." And the telegram insisted on his coming the next day and staying as long as he liked.

"An old pal, my dear ; we must all do our best to make him welcome. An old pal—the best I had—a bit rough perhaps now, a bit liverish too, I expect—we'll soon set that to rights," and he broke off into renewed chuckles.

A Boy's Marriage 87

Mr. Teruel was in capital fettle. For Stephanie Dartené had at last settled, after much trouble and delay—a month or two later than he intended—in her house at Littlehampton, and already her apartments were let for June and July. He was very glad that it was thus possible for him to pick up the threads of his youth. Not that he had any wish for the old days to come back in their entirety ; he knew the supreme value of comfort, and was not sentimental about youth, seeing clearly the risks through which he had been miraculously steered. But it would be pleasant to yarn about old times with a friend, and that after all was the chief attraction of old times ; and it was still pleasanter to be in a position to make a person, whom he cared as much for as he had cared for Stephanie, comfortable with so little difficulty. He had no grounds for complaining of the way life had treated him ; so it was strange that he did not wish to.

The first time he called on Stephanie the old qualms and scruples arose within him ; she looked older and more worn than she ought to have looked, if ease like his own had been her lot. He would have felt more comfortable in his mind if she had abused or reproached him ever so slightly. Then he could have pointed out to her

how excessively lucky she really was, kindly and clearly shown her her good fortune ; but she pointed this out to him instead, and left what there was of reproach for his own heart to make. She was rather stout and her hair was very grey ; she was cheerful and practical as ever, and spoke to him with a mixture of respect and affection with which an old and privileged servant would have addressed him. He had come with a secret desire for a scene of sentiment, if not of slight tragedy ; and for a moment her manner of address hurt him in a way which he could not understand, and to which he certainly would not have owned. She thanked him with sincerity, but without profusion ; and introduced him to her daughter, whom he had not ever seen. Again an odd, incomprehensible feeling overtook him—of relief or of regret, he did not know which—that the daughter resembled her father, and was wholly unlike what Stephanie had been when she was a girl. There was the same pride and character visible in the way she held herself, something about her which conveyed the idea of relationship with no actual resemblance.

Mr. Teruel was anxious to see how time had dealt with Roger Calderon. He had been a burly, brusque fellow, loud and devoted. He added up the years since they had met—he must

A Boy's Marriage 89

be well over fifty. It would be most interesting. He sought out from a drawer a photograph that had been taken of himself at that time ; he stood opposite the glass holding it in his hand—"H'm—unrecognisable," he thought, "I shall not go and meet him at the station."

In reality the change was not very material. Calderon's personality was exaggerated and not diminished by the years. He was more brusque and more burly. His face had become fuller, but was more sallow.

He came in time for dinner, and after dinner they sat on into the small hours, talking of his Indian experiences.

He was an active man, brimful of life and averse to the stagnation of the body. He hired a horse which he put in the empty stall ; and on this hack—of necessity a strong one, he rode fifteen stone—he scoured the neighbourhood. He played golf on the links of Littlehampton, and in the evening, when vigorous exercise had toned his energy down to the proper level and Mr. Teruel was raised by a day of ease to the equivalent pitch, they played billiards or bezique.

"I've worked hard for thirty years, and now I'm going to have a good time ; a damn good time, not waste one hour," was the comment he

passed on his life, with emphatic slaps on his knee.

"Be aisy with yourself," was Mr. Teruel's rejoinder.

Marion liked him ; for all his roughness he was not inconsiderate. And though she had nothing in common with him, his obvious attachment to her father appealed to her. He called him "Jimmy," and she liked to hear him do so.

He behaved like a schoolboy on the first week of his holidays, but he had a man's pertinacity in the pursuit of his end, which made him more boyish than boys are wont to be. That was why he was able to say and do things which the family would have resented in another.

One day Marion came out to the two men, who were sitting on the gravel path by the lawn, sunning themselves. They were silent and looked thoughtful. Calderon was stroking his chin petulantly as a man who is discontented with his razor's edge might after shaving. He leapt to his feet so that Marion jumped, and said with earnestness in his bluff voice—

"Let me tell you this, Miss Marion Teruel, that one time and another I have met a good many hundred men, and that your father bar

none—bar absolutely not one—is the staunchest pal a man or woman could find.”

She did not know that the outburst was the result of his having learned from Mr. Teruel the history of Stephanie subsequent to his leaving London for Brighton ; nor did she know that his direct comment had been, “Safer, begad, at Land’s End or John o’ Groats.”

He went on in a less truculent manner—

“Now tell me honestly—shall I be in the way, do you think, staying on after the young un, Beverley, returns ? Your mother might want to have no strangers.” (The last word elicited a denunciatory kick from Mr. Teruel.) “Tell me straight out, and I’ll pack up and be off like a shot ; no feelings hurt. Keep those dratted feet to yourself,” he added, turning to Mr. Teruel.

“I am quite sure you would not be in any one’s way. Besides, Beverley, I know, wants to see you.”

“He does, does he ? And I want to see him, young beggar. His father’s son is in my heart already. So that’s settled ? Your hand on it.”

He held out an enormous hand which Marion took laughing.

“Well, well. You’ve missed our chance now.

I suppose we'll have to harbour this bear a bit longer," said Mr. Teruel, with appropriate resignation in his voice.

So it came about that Beverley on his return found Mr. Roger Calderon ensconced at Holmwood Hall.

VIII

AT Beverley's special request, no one met them at the station, and no one was waiting for them at their own house, which was called "The Lodge." He would not arrive till late and did not want to see any one that evening. All were secretly a little surprised and hurt, but all said how they understood and sympathised with his feeling. Mrs. Teruel thought, "Not even his mother"; and Marion knew that as he couldn't bear to see his mother he could not very well ask for her, or else of course—but none guessed the true reason, no one had a suspicion of what his real motive was.

Ajax, newly bathed and combed and brushed, instinctively felt that something was going to happen. Jane, who followed "her boy" in service to the Lodge, had told him many times; but it is not possible to be certain that he understood. He was restless the whole day, wandering from room to room, lying down with ears pricked up and starting at the least noise.

Jane trusted she would remember her place in spite of her intense excitement. "He's no longer your boy, he's grown up and your young master now, bless him," she kept saying to herself.

For her happiness it was well that she was ignorant how much Beverley, as he drove from the station, was dreading the outburst of sentiment which he knew was awaiting him ; he shrank from hurting her feelings ; he shrank from the pain she would cause him now.

It was a beautiful warm spring evening, star-bright, with a gentle wind blowing from the sea, and a small moon was shining its kindest.

At last they arrived.

"Oh, how nice it is to be home," said Eva. "And how are you, Jane ? Have you supper ready ? And there's dear Ajax."

He rushed by her, and with little yelps of excitement unsuppressible sprang round Beverley, who knelt down and caressed him.

Beverley took off his boots in the hall and went upstairs to his dressing-room. He sat down disconsolately on the edge of the bed, noticing without a gleam of pleasure that flowers had been put in every vase.

And this was his home-coming.

"Be as quick as you can, dear," Eva called

through the door, on her way downstairs. "Supper is quite ready."

He washed and went downstairs.

"Jane," said Eva during supper, "I shall want all the keys of everything to-morrow morning, and we must have a long and important house-keeping talk."

Jane was more bewildered and delighted at Eva's prettiness than ever. The sea air had brightened her eyes and cheeks. What a little woman she was !

All the meal Eva kept up a ceaseless ripple of talk about the house and the garden, admiring this and thinking how the dirt would be hidden by that, if great care were not taken ; and ended by saying how pleased she was they were going to settle down comfortably at last. She saw that Beverley seemed moody, and she did her best to cheer him up ; he was easily depressed, she knew.

"I shall go up now, dear. I've one or two things I must see to ; and I'm quite tired after the journey." She kissed her husband's forehead.

He sat for some time cutting the peel of an apple into small pieces. Then two tears rolled down his cheeks. He rose quickly and laughed aloud. Ajax looked up and wagged his tail.

"Glad I'm back, old boy? Thank God, you can't talk. Come on." And he went into the garden.

He saw the moon and the stars and the dark still outlines of the trees and shrubs; he smelled the fragrance of the air, and he wished that there was a rough wind and pelting rain, that the sky was in confusion. Beauty hurt him. The peace and silence of the night derided him. He turned to Ajax. "She doesn't understand, boy, that's all." And something gripped his throat.

He went back into his study.

Soon Jane tapped and entered, carrying a tray with a siphon and whisky and biscuits.

His heart sank.

"Is that all you want, sir?" She smoothed out her apron. "You're the young master now; you that I nursed and bathed; and to think how I'm the first to welcome you and your sweet bride; and happy she looks. And well I know my good fortune——"

"Yes, Jane, but——"

"To see you in your new joy; and a sweeter babe than you never was born——"

"Jane, there's something you can do for me. Don't ever goss—talk with any one about us—any one."

"Now is it likely——"

"Never. Promise me. I hate gossip."

He made a great effort as she was preparing to go. He could not hurt her by seeming hard and cold. He got up and said excitedly—

"We've had a splendid time, Nan. You should just see the enormous cliffs in Cornwall, and the way the sea comes dashing against them, and the Logan Rock that they say moves, and you can climb all over it; and Land's End, we drove there—oh, we've had a splendid time! and I'm glad you're here. You make it seem like home; and you'll look after—after my wife. Good night, Nan."

"Good night, sir," she said, beaming, with noticeable emphasis on the last word, and went out of the room jubilant.

He could no longer stem the tide of sorrow which he had been forcing under control; it swept away all barriers and overwhelmed him. He put his head between his hands and wept; sobs shook his body.

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For this is what had happened.

After much discussion it had been decided that the bride and bridegroom should not start for their honeymoon until the day after the

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wedding. Mrs. Teruel urged the discomfort of a strange hotel in London and begged Beverley to stop one night just as her own boy in the old home. And Beverley was easily persuaded.

So they started very early in the morning for London, to catch the 10.50 for Penzance from Paddington. Beverley noticed that Eva was silent and nervous, and he accepted her word without question when she said, "I've been in a train so little ; it all seems so strange." He did not know that she meant there was something far stranger to her than being in a train. He did not know what Eva's aunt had felt it her duty to say to her on the previous evening . . . without any malice, without any unkind intention . . . but she had taken Eva in her arms, sobbing over her and calling her a poor lamb, which Eva resented ; but her aunt persisted with "Poor thing, it's your sweet ignorance of what men are." And vague fears which were already in her mind, and which were so shadowy that she had hitherto been easily able to drive them away, grew and possessed her. She no longer thought simply of the pleasure of being alone with Beverley ; he suddenly appeared in a new light ; as though he must be cruel because he was a man, and she must submit to his cruelty because she was his wife.

A Boy's Marriage 99

For the first time in her life she had slept very little, and lying awake in the dark (she had been too frightened to get out of bed and light a candle) had added to her fears.

And now she was alone with him, and she felt tired and afraid and very lonely.

She watched for a sign of cruelty in Beverley. So that when he took her hand and holding it tightly in his said, "Isn't it sweet to be alone at last," she whispered "Yes," and he thrilled at what he thought to be her exquisite modesty, and what was in reality her instinctive fear.

At lunch, in the company of others, she forgot her fears for a little and Beverley made her laugh, but when they came back to their carriage and Beverley embraced her passionately, she was again overwhelmed by this inexplicable horror. Her love of him was quite sincere, but was so slender that her natural dread of the unknown, increased by her prattling aunt, had driven it out of existence. It was not at all her fault. It never occurred to her to tell Beverley of her fears. She forgot how happy she used to feel in his arms, and how she liked him to kiss her eyes and hair—she always moved her lips from his instinctively, and Beverley easily overcame any wish to do what she did not want, especially a wish so vague as his ignorance made this wish ;

he felt it to be merely a whim that had taken his fancy after reading a line in Shelley.

For Beverley knew nothing : he had imagined everything.

Had an older man diagnosed Eva to him as a girl who would be a good mother and who needed careful handling, he would have been shocked at the point of view ; it would have seemed to him very disgusting and would have been wholly meaningless. He saw everything in the light of a symbol, and he was perfectly right in doing so ; only he did not know in the least how to realise the beauty of the symbol.

Eva was pretending to sleep ; he watched her with delight.

At last they reached Penzance at twenty minutes to seven. The train was a few minutes late.

Beverley did not notice the smiles and glances of the porters and servants. He was too pre-occupied with the joy of being alone with Eva, with the joy of looking after her, and with a faint elusive fear of the unknown, which made his joy more poignant.

They had three rooms, and he opened the window of the sitting-room and showed her the sea and the outline of the harbour-wall in the distance on the right. The lights twinkled

A Boy's Marriage 101

along the esplanade ; the waves murmured on the shore.

Then the porter brought in the boxes ; and laughingly he insisted on finding her shoes and dress, and, laughing, he called her his queen and insisted on unbuttoning her boots and in arranging all the contents of her dressing-case on the table.

She watched him, wondering when he would leave her alone.

When he went to his dressing-room she began to cry. She had never been so far away from home in her life before. She felt very lonely. She did not like any one to touch her clothes.

She was beginning to take off her travelling things, when Beverley came in and said, "The cloth's all laid ; leave your door open and we can talk while we dress."

She was horrified. "Oh, please no," she said.

And he came and kissed her and said, "Do whatever you like in the whole world, you lovely darling," and went away.

And she washed and dressed in haste, fearful that he might at any moment come in again. She could hear him whistling.

It was such a relief to have finished dressing without interruption that her spirits came back

a little and a momentary feeling of pride in her husband came pleasantly over her ; he looked so neat and strong and handsome as he held out both his arms to her, that of her own accord she went up and kissed him.

And dinner was charming. The salt-cellar were forgotten, and Beverley told her it was her business to tell the maid, and she told the maid shyly, and the maid's "I beg your pardon, madam" embarrassed and delighted her.

After dinner was cleared away, Beverley settled her with cushions on the sofa, and sat with her feet in his lap stroking them and talking delightful nonsense to her, to which she had only to say "Yes, yes" from time to time. She felt very sleepy after the long journey and the claret which Beverley had obliged her to drink at dinner.

Until something she heard him say startled her and renewed the vague apprehension. She had said "Yes" in the same dreamy way, and he had leaned suddenly over her and crushed her in his arms, kissing her again and again.

So she got up and said she would like to go to—to her room, as she was tired. And then he thanked her rapturously, as though she had said it on purpose to please him. Her fears redoubled.

"I've not seen your room, have I?" she said.

"No, come and see, sweetheart."

He opened the door and switched on the light. She thought he was trembling and strange.

"You untidy boy," she managed to say, "but you'll be nice and comfy here, won't you?"

And he took her in his arms again and told her not to be a horrible little tease; and she could not understand what he could possibly mean, still less when he flung out his arms and said, "Oh, isn't it godlike to be alone at last!"

And as he closed her door he said, "Only ten minutes, only ten minutes."

Could he mean—she stood listening, terrified. His door slammed. She almost cried out with relief. Of course he only meant that she must be asleep in ten minutes.

She took off her dress and sat down in front of the glass to do her hair, smiling even at using her new silver-backed brush; she felt hardly afraid at all now of being alone in a strange room, although it was so much larger than her own, and so much higher.

She could not hear Beverley's voice through the closed doors: he was chanting to himself in ecstasy—

"Ha! ha! the triumph, the delight, the madness;
The boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness";

and the spirit of that pæan of the Earth's joy passed through him, though he forgot the exact words until he came to the Moon's rejoinder, and then he remembered and said softly aloud—

“Music is in the sea and air,
Winged clouds soar here and there,
Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of :
’Tis love, all love !”

Eva began to tidy her room. She was scrupulously neat, and everything round her must always be in precise order before she could feel comfortable ; and she had very many new things, all of which she found a delight in touching as she put them carefully away. In her pleasure she forgot the strangeness of the big hotel room, and she forgot the vague dread, and she felt only tired enough to be sure she would sleep without waking—and she always liked the sense of freedom when her hair was down and its caress over her shoulders. It was not a long time since she had put her hair up for the first time.

Beverley opened the door so quietly that his hands were almost on her shoulders before she realised the horror of his presence.

She hid her face in her hands for shame ; she could not speak, while he kissed her neck. . . .
“Darling, my darling sweetheart, she's never

looked so lovely"; and he took her hands from her face, and she faltered, horrified, "Go away, please go away," trying to turn away from his bright eyes.

But he seemed not to hear.

He thought it was just her sweet modesty that forced her to hide her dear real feelings.

"Dearest heart, you're sweeter and dearer like this; and you're dearest and sweetest of all with nothing, nothing, nothing to keep you from me." (He knelt down and put his arms round her.) "Oh, she knows that, doesn't she?"

"Go away . . . oh please . . . go away!" she persisted, and she began to cry.

Then all his passion passed into tenderness.

"Dearie, dearie, what is the matter? Don't cry; you mustn't cry, little pet. Tell me what is it?"

But he could not comfort her; she went on crying and saying in a choking voice, "Go away!" until his heart ached.

"Don't you love me?" he asked. "Tell me you love me."

"Yes . . . yes . . . but go away."

"Why won't you let me be with you, dearie?" He was bewildered.

"I'm frightened; I'm . . . I'm so tired . . . I want to be alone . . . I . . . to-morrow."

The word made him happy again.

"Say you love me. Darling, who could help wanting . . . at once . . . when you're so lovely. Say you love me."

"I . . . I love you."

"You perfect, sweet darling ; say you want me to-morrow."

"I want you to-morrow," she repeated ; not understanding, but ready to say anything that he might leave her the sooner. And he went away, not understanding ; quite content with the smile she managed to give him as he waved his hand to her at the door. He did not know that she cried on and on until she cried herself to sleep. How could he know ?

She loved him ; she wanted him to-morrow. She was the dearer for her sweet modesty. He felt so sure that he absolutely understood it and her, that he was not troubled by her tears. When in the morning she asked him to forgive her for being so silly, he would explain it all to her, how it was not silliness but something real and beautiful which existed to make her all the dearer to him.

And he hummed love-songs to himself until he sang himself to sleep.

He awoke when the dawn was breaking.

He would go very softly, so that the exquisite

A Boy's Marriage 107

delight might be his of seeing her asleep ; so that he might waken her with kisses and hold her, warm and sleepy, close, close to his heart.

She lay asleep ; he was certain that she was still sleeping.

He watched her in delight, thinking Love had been kind to him in granting his wish ; and then he kissed her shut eyes. She moved her head aside and trembled. It thrilled him.

Then he crept in by her. He too was trembling—not with terror, but with delight at her softness and sweetness. He too could not speak.

His heart beat feverishly. The tumult of passion held him. He began to kiss her and kiss her. The fury of emotion swept him beyond kindness, beyond all control. His arms hurt her. He was young and rough and ignorant . . . but when the madness passed he saw her lying trembling ; he saw her turn away from him, aghast, too terrified to cry.

And dismay and shame overwhelmed him—suddenly.

“Don't you love me ?” he whispered, again and again.

“Leave . . . leave me . . . alone.” . . .

“Don't you love me ? Don't you love me ?” he implored.

108 A Boy's Marriage

"Please . . . please . . . go away."

And always she persisted in her entreaty "Go away, go away" to his pleading, to his protesting. . . .

At last he went away.

At breakfast neither could meet the other's eye, and afterwards Beverley said, "Don't be afraid . . . you . . . you need not be afraid . . . I . . . never, never again . . . I thought you loved me." . . .

And he went for a long walk that morning alone.

Why had she married him, why had she married him if she did not love him? And his own love, what was it? And he began to question his love, and the agony of doubt began its own slow torture upon him.

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Ah! swift is the coming of disillusion which has been generously fostered by ignorance and a vivid imagination. And the dust of its wreckage settles thickly on the mind, polluting its vision with the pollution of disappointment, of distrust, and of misery. For no one can be disillusioned in what he holds dearest without his disillusionment affecting his whole outlook upon life. No longer does the soul find pleasure in

seeking what is beautiful, but turns with a kind of sinister relief to what is foul. Beauty becomes suspect, and ugliness passes for truth.

Such was Beverley's experience.

His whole interest in life had been centred in love ; love had been his religion, his faith, his exaltation. His whole heart yearned for love. Eva had been the magnet attracting his love to herself, and his fancy had vested her with all the qualities that his ideal love should possess. In her he had but loved his own idea of love. Swiftly and relentlessly nature had shown him his mistake, and made clear to him the conflict, which his happy life had never developed, but which must take place in the mind of every man—the conflict between the body and the soul.

For in youth there are two instincts within us, the instinct of the body and the instinct of the soul. They are not united in their quest for happiness. They are at war. The soul cries out for mortification of the body and from the cold height of superiority repudiates the body's claims ; while the body frets at the suffering and isolation induced by the soul's yearning, for its end is so easily to be attained. Commonly the forces of the body are strong and tumultuous and carry the first defences by storm, so that their numbers are seen and their

mode of attack becomes familiar. But in Beverley the conflict was more subtle. His very innocence proved a snare. For the enemy was more deceptive, and hid his true device under the colours of the soul. There are some men and some things which must be hated before they can be loved, must be enemies before they can be friends. But Beverley hardly knew of any conflict, because the enemy masqueraded as a friend so cleverly to his inexperience that he had but rare suspicions of hostility, faint suspicions which only served to make him doubt, not his motives, but his loyalty.

Before he knew of the opposing forces he found that he had experienced a terrible defeat, from which he might not ever have the strength to recover : the moment when he had thought to encounter love triumphant had proved the moment of his desolation : the palace of his vision had fallen, and he was among the ruins bewildered, groping, half stunned by the shock, with the certainty throbbing dully, yet persistently, within him that all beauty had passed out of his life, and had passed out of his life for ever.

He had dreamed of love in ignorance, the beautiful dreams of a young mind ; but the ordeal of initiation needs to be faced by the power

A Boy's Marriage I I I

of knowledge, and he was without knowledge. He imagined that his girl wife would feel as he felt, would find joy as he would find joy ; but she shrank from him in horror, terrified and ashamed. He was a brute, ignoble in her eyes and his own. He did not understand why. But his heart was wounded, his soul was in revolt. He cursed himself and her ; he cursed nature and life and love ; but he did not curse his own ignorance.

Never should he forget the agony of grief which had tortured him during those past days. There seemed something abominable in the festivities, in all the gay mockery of gladness which had lured him on to this sacrifice of what he loved to his own destructive selfishness. He remembered the tears in the eyes of his mother, and he asked himself why she had not warned him, why she had left him in ignorance of the truth. And a great pity entered his heart for women, and with it a loathing of himself and all men. Did love mean a terrible sacrifice for all women, that men might have pleasure at their expense ? Then love was loathsome.

Oh, those days with the girl who loved him—whom he loved—while he watched her drifting far—irrevocably far—from him, helpless to win her back. He realised he had never known this

girl whom he had made his wife, who was to be the mother of his children and live with him all his life. He seemed never to have thought before. He was bewildered. Were all women alike? Yet his mother and father were happy. He had tried to be a friend to his wife. No one could know the effort he had made. He had even tried to explain how he felt; but she could not understand. The consciousness of having wronged her irreparably was redoubled in his mind. And the anguish of feeling they were gradually drifting apart, becoming strangers, and strangers living in intimacy!

They were both so young, so tongue-tied, and so ignorant. Life lowered before him, hard, bleak, and comfortless.

This girl had left her home and come to him, to make her home with him. As a boy digs up a primrose wantonly from its place in the wood, he had taken her from her peaceful surroundings. He had meant to give her happiness, and he did not know at all how to make her happy. She shrank from him. . . . What had he to offer her? Nothing. And what did she give him? Nothing. She was as ignorant of him as he was of her. She could not understand the despair of his heart, which he could not explain more clearly.

A Boy's Marriage 113

The bitter thought came to him that she did not want to understand. Was it possible her idea of love was a bargain in which she yielded her body and took in exchange the management of his house? Could this be the sordid truth?

His thoughts were base and futile. Why only now—now that it was too late—had he begun to think? Why? He cried aloud, and his cry remained unanswered.

And there came upon him a sense of loneliness, dreadful loneliness that haunted him, active loneliness that seemed to sever his connection with the world in which he lived.

He shuddered to think that the memory of these days would remain with him, like some crawling thing for ever coiled within his heart, like some foul sore in his inmost soul. Oh God! it would poison his whole life.

IX

EVA, too, had suffered ; but she was not so highly strung as Beverley, who being capable of greater joy was also capable of more intense suffering. She had written to her aunt hinting at some trouble, and had received a reply, suavely philosophic in its tone, expressing her belief that women had much to put up with and must bear their burdens in a spirit of proper resignation. With this reply she was quite satisfied.

Moreover, common sense soon came to her rescue. She understood nothing of Beverley's misery, but she resolved to be patient and cheerful, and she was sure that his mood of depression would quickly pass away. She was not keenly sensitive nor highly intelligent, but she cared very much for Beverley and was grieved that he was sad. She was more than willing to do anything to please him, to make any sacrifice. She had clearly told him so, and she could not understand why he appeared more hurt at that

A Boy's Marriage 115

than anything. Why couldn't he be her nice lover, with whom she had been delighted? Why couldn't he be jolly and natural as he used to be before their marriage, and not behave morosely as though he were some tragedy prince with a great sorrow in his heart. She wanted him to caress her, and cried sometimes that he was so distant and forbidding.

One day at Penzance she had tried to make it up with him; she had sat on his knee. But he lifted her on to the chair and said, "You don't understand." Understand what? Why should he repulse her? He was a man and surely he ought to make her understand. He had terrified and shocked her once by his behaviour. But would he never forgive her for her terror? How could a man terrify the girl he loved? How could he have come into her room when she was feeling so strange and lonely, and behave in that mad way—she shuddered at the thought.

But he was her husband, and she loved him very much. So she bravely kept her resolve to be bright and cheerful, assuring herself that things would soon come right.

Meanwhile they were at home and she had her own house to look after, and this idea at any rate charmed her.

116 A Boy's Marriage

She awoke on the first morning after their arrival delighted to see the sun shining through the window of her own room, in her own house. She always slept with the window open and the blinds pulled up, because she liked to waken in daylight and see at once whether the weather was fine or wet. She looked at the rose-coloured curtains of her bed, that were the same colour as the window curtains and the covering of the chairs and sofa. She had always dreamed of a room like this. Her eyes fell on the dressing-table, on which the contents of her dressing-case, silver-topped, silver-backed, were neatly spread, and she gave a little laugh of pleasure. It was nice to have one's very own house. It would be nice, too, to meet her aunt as a married woman, with a house of her own, and not as a girl whom her aunt was considerate enough to allow to live with her. Of course her aunt was a dear. But it was sweet to be independent, and not continually to be told to do this and that before she had time to do it of her own accord. She was living, too, so near that she could always see that her aunt was comfortable, quite as well as if she were always with her : everything would be a kindness now, not a duty ; and so she would enjoy everything she did much more when it was not quietly expected of her.

A Boy's Marriage 117

And Beverley? Perhaps he would have cheered up again. How absurd his melancholy was, poor dear. And she wished that she knew how to send it all away.

She dressed quickly and went downstairs to breakfast.

He was waiting in the dining-room, and came forward and kissed her forehead.

"Why always my forehead?" she thought. "Why doesn't he take me in his arms and dance me round the room?" But it was impossible for her to make the suggestion.

"It's bound to come all right soon," she assured herself, as she poured him out his coffee.

One by one during the morning the family dropped in, and Eva welcomed them to her house, while Beverley began his long rôle in the farce of maintaining appearances—his interminable part in life. He did not try to strike the note of exuberance, which he could not hope to prolong; but he aimed at the monotone of contentment. He was unaccustomed to any mask and in consequence it galled him. He longed to tear it away and reveal his naked misery. Only shame prevented him, and the knowledge that the revelation would be more intolerable by adding to his own the weight of his family's disappointment. Moreover, his grief was all

118 A Boy's Marriage

that remained of his love dream ; and so his grief was sacred.

His powers of endurance were taxed to the utmost by Calderon's bluff heartiness. The man's presence was a strain to him ; and a strong antipathy sprang up almost immediately within him, which quickly became mutual. Calderon could not tolerate the cold reserve which met his overtures.

"Ugh," he thought, "a superior prig from Oxford ; and precious little has he to be superior about, for all his airs and his wife and his second in English Literature." So he never let Beverley alone, continually exasperating him with little sarcasms about culture and elegance and ease. Nor did he allow Beverley to ignore his remarks, but pressed them well home. The thought how he would have rollicked with Calderon a few months before made Beverley colder than ever.

Marion took up the cudgels for her brother. She could not understand the change in his behaviour, and supposed that he was unwell and preoccupied, and that Calderon got on his nerves. She was troubled about him. She would not let herself think that the change was radical, that the closeness of their friendship was at an end. That would have been disloyal in her. She was adroit in finding excuses for the

A Boy's Marriage 119

strangeness of his conduct, especially when that strangeness was hurting her most acutely.

Mr. Teruel saw the hostility between his friend and son. Some men, he reasoned, never could hit it off together, though both might be excellent fellows. He regretted it. But there was no need to like one or the other a whit less. Of course both were gentlemen, and knew how to behave.

But one evening a serious misadventure occurred.

The dining-room at Holmwood Hall was a large room, and at dinner was lighted only with candles placed on the table and shaded so that when the servant removed the candles from the sideboard after handing the coffee, comparative darkness enclosed the brightness of the table; an arrangement upon which Mr. Teruel insisted, saying that he hated the flare of a gin-palace and liked to see his smoke fade into the gloom. Calderon hinted at an innovation. His hints were those an elephant might give. But they were ignored.

The occasion was a special one—Calderon's last evening, and when the three ladies withdrew two bottles of old port were brought in. Old wine was one of the very few things which Calderon respected—in this world or the next.

The sight of the corked and cobwebbed bottles filled him with awe. To decant the wine himself was another of old Teruel's whims, and upon this too he allowed no argument. In silence Calderon had in the morning watched the careful process, in silence now he inhaled the wine's fragrance once and again, and once and again, deeply, deliberately ; he eyed its depth of crimson colour, made a last attempt to catch the soul of the vintage in a breath and taste it, a sip for the palate to enjoy, to caress the throat ; then a deep breath, a movement of the tongue, and delicate platronics were at an end. He drank down the remainder of the glass. The full body of the wine made an imperious appeal, and his own body answered revelling and caroused.

Beverley drank his glass without preliminary, rose, shut the door, and retreated to an arm-chair at the far end of the room by the fireplace. His elders left him unnoticed. For them he sank to an ignorant boy, no longer a son or a friend's son.

The two men nursed their enjoyment—silently. The spirit of Epicurus smiled approval, as they drank with proper reverence. They became transformed and united with the bond of devotees, and ceased for a silent moment to be poor human beings. Centuries

A Boy's Marriage 121

of time and pain and personality fell away, and they became one with the great spirit of good wine.

But they were impelled to make use of that mortal foible—speech. The spell was broken. The good spirit fled.

“Not much wrong with this?” queried Mr. Teruel.

“There is not,” his friend answered slowly.

By means of speech they pursued the departed spirit, trying to find expression for the vitality that coursed through them. Youth, effort, all their previous life led on to this culminating moment, now, as they sat together and drank their old port. So they talked of the early days: giving hints that started their thoughts on the same track, hints that silence followed, and short ejaculations, until little by little memories became more vivid than the actual present, and everything else was forgotten.

Beverley dozing moodily in the dark recesses of his arm-chair ceased to exist for either, and they for him. He was immersed in his own unhappiness, the subject which engrossed his mind now perpetually—which had become a habit. Calderon roused him by a sudden thwack upon the table.

“No man ever had a better mistress—a fine

122 A Boy's Marriage

girl—magnificent. . . . And here's many lodgers to her now."

Beverley heard the words, which brought no significance to him.

"To Stephanie : bless her !" the voice went on. And their meaning became terribly clear to him. He was not shocked or stupefied. Any baseness seemed natural in this strange world. Still it seemed to him a pity that his father's whole life should be false. But it occurred to him that of course he ought not to be eaves-dropping. So he got up, and saying, "I think I'll take a turn in the garden," he went out of the room. His suspicions were confirmed by the way the two men stared at him—blankly.

"Gad—the young beggar made me jump. I thought he'd gone long ago," said Calderon, emptying his glass.

"Do you think he heard ? How much ?" asked Mr. Teruel in a voice which made his friend say earnestly—

"What's the matter, old chap ?"

"Matter ! Good God ! Why the boy's as ignorant as a girl ; knows nothing."

"Well, the sooner he does, the better, damn him ! But I'm sorry, devilish sorry. I'll talk to him. To think the young prig should think ill of his father——"

"Perhaps he didn't hear. I love that boy. I couldn't bear him to think—perhaps he didn't understand. He didn't look disgusted, did he?—just tired of sitting there—quite natural."

"And after all there's nothing to be ashamed about. All men——"

"I tell you he's pure."

"Ugh! Purity!"

There was a silence during which Mr. Teruel tried to convince himself that there was no need to be upset, and Calderon fumed at his own indiscretion and Beverley's ridiculous innocence.

For both the port had lost its charm, and they left the larger half of the second bottle without a regret.

Beverley went into the garden. He wandered aimlessly along the paths and back into the drawing-room. What he had just heard, had not yet become personal and shocking—only another incident in the mad scheme of things—which was life. When he said good night that evening he did not kiss his father, for the first time in his life. He had no wish to wound him. It only seemed impossible and absurd to demonstrate affection in a universe that appeared to grow more strange and more evil to him every day. But as he was going out of the front door, it seemed on the whole more foolish to break through any

124 A Boy's Marriage

custom. So he went back into the smoking-room, and saying without the least trace of emotion of any kind, "I forgot to say good night," he kissed his father in the usual way. And his father was not at all comforted, but on the contrary felt that his son had suddenly become a stranger to him.

"What interests you in life?" said Beverley to Eva, as they walked down the drive.

"Why, lots and lots of things," she answered.

"What a funny thing to ask!"

"But tell me, what things?" he persisted.

"Oh, the house . . . the . . . the housekeeping . . . and . . . I don't know . . . what interests you?"

"Nothing," said Beverley, "nothing."

X

AFTER Calderon's departure Mr. Teruel began to observe Beverley more closely, and naturally he construed the change in his manner into the direct outcome of what he had heard that fatal evening and was much distressed. That there might be some other reason for his son's depression did not occur to him, because he felt sufficient cause existed in the discovery that his father was not what he had thought him. Mr. Teruel had no idea of excusing himself or of attempting to explain his past conduct—partly, no doubt, because he realised that an explanation would be futile—he contented himself by resenting the ignorance which he had cherished in his son, by bemoaning Calderon's indiscretion, and by laughing at himself for being so easily hurt by his son's hardness and stupidity.

But as the days went on and Beverley remained distant, without reproach that might have helped to bring matters to a head, but indifferent and inert, the situation got upon Mr.

Teruel's nerves and became intolerable. The more he thought, the more of course his perplexity increased. After twenty years' tranquillity of mind, a continual worry, however inconsiderable, quickly becomes unbearable. Sometimes he determined to have the whole matter out once and for all ; but when the time came, the barriers between them appeared insurmountable.. It seemed best to wait and do nothing precipitate, and waiting taxed his patience to the uttermost.

Mr. Teruel avoided all conversation with Marion about him ; so Marion remained in ignorance and was very sad that her brother had changed entirely to her. There was silent discord in the house, jarring upon every one but Mrs. Teruel, who noticed nothing and found Eva a great comfort, and the new house an added interest, because Eva was thoughtful enough to ask her advice upon many little points of household management.

Mr. Teruel from time to time used to call on Stephanie to see how she was getting on. He rarely stayed longer than five minutes when he went into the house, and generally she came out to him in the dog-cart. He had nothing to say to her ; they had nothing but a memory in common. Yet he experienced an indefinable

feeling of satisfaction, almost pleasure, in knowing that she was near, that he could see her, and that she had not passed entirely out of his life. This was not due to a love of patronage, but to the habit of loyalty which was inherent in his nature. He hated rather than feared death, which was to him the disturber of all peace, and absolute separation was death as far as he himself was concerned. She had been part of his life, and so he liked her to be near, though he could hardly be said to have any actual affection for her. It was an outcome of the same idea that made him treasure up all his old pipes, having reverently carved the year of their use upon the bowl.

So it came about that one afternoon when he drove to Littlehampton, he stopped at Stephanie's house on the parade, and getting a small boy to hold his horse, he went indoors and down into her sitting-room in the basement, opening into the kitchen. He had not come with the settled intention of confiding in her, but he was drawn almost unconsciously to the one person whose strength he had occasion to know from experience. The oddness of his position in that little parlour with the stout aproned woman in front did not strike him. She was merely a human being whom he knew would understand his

128 A Boy's Marriage

difficulty. He did not observe how the respectful distance of manner forsook her when he said, sadly enough, after the usual commonplaces—

“I'm in trouble, Stephanie.”

“Ah ! I saw there was something.”

It was the first time he had called her by name for many years ; it was the first time she had dropped the rôle into which she had forced herself—of inferior in rank. The reason was that it was the first time he had been in want of her sympathy as a human being.

There was something soothing in her foreign accent and emphasis. He told her quite simply his misgivings, and asked her advice as to what was best for him to do. Selfishly perhaps ; but he had no idea that they might hurt her. The past was so long past that it hardly held any reality for him, and the present was weighing upon him heavily. Nor had he any conception how much that past meant to Stephanie. As a matter of fact, it meant just as much as the one completely happy time in rather a hard and sad life would mean to a woman who knew how to love. Certain words he used implying disgrace to their connection awoke passionate resentment in her. That view had long slept in her memory. But she had suffered enough to learn self-control ; she had loved enough to know the meaning of

unselfishness, and all bitterness vanished as she saw the man sitting before her, again confiding in her, again leaning upon her strength. He wanted her help, and that was enough.

A middle-aged landlady and an elderly man in a tweed suit of dittos in a small back parlour—with stuffed birds upon the mantelpiece and coloured paper shavings in the fireplace—and a loyalty which would grace the lay of any troubadour, singing the power of love. The birds on the mantelpiece stared with their glass eyes over them—silent and stuffed, symbolic of modern environment. “Stone walls do not a prison make,” sang Lovelace ; not even bricks and cheap furniture and the smell of cooking can stifle certain spirits by their continual presence, even when that presence is not noticed.

She pulled the lobe of her ear as he remembered that she had always pulled it, when at all roused, quickly and decisively. Indeed, all her gestures were finished and vigorous ; they were the direct language of her instinct and intensely individual.

“I will go to see him,” she said at last. Each syllable, cut off from its fellows, came from her mouth with peculiar distinctness.

“Perhaps he doesn't know.” He remembered saying this before to Calderon ; moreover that

130 A Boy's Marriage

was the chief end of his musings, but one which gave him small comfort. So the words sounded feeble and plaintive to his own ears, and made him more conscious than ever how wearisome the whole business was.

"Ah! That I will soon discover. He shall hear; he shall know that he need not blush for his father. No! *Mon Dieu*, no! Nor be ashamed of me. That big fool Calderon; I would like to speak something to him: *Toujours un sot: quel dommage!*"

She wasted no time; she went the same evening.

Beverley sat in his study that evening quite unconscious that a visitor was on her way to him by the sea road from Littlehampton.

Little by little he went from the drawing-room more early, leaving Eva to read or doze, on the plea of wanting to work. But he did not work. He sat looking into the fireplace, listless and brooding. His sorrow had lost its sting, but none of its dull weight; that accumulated, and crushed him. The world seemed evil. His father had kept a mistress; he himself ought never to have been born, he was merely the outcome of a lie. Well, it didn't much matter; he had cared for his father before he knew, and he cared for him still; but it seemed a pity that

A Boy's Marriage 131

he should have deceived his mother for more than twenty years.

He wondered how his father could go on taking an interest in the same trivialities ; how his mother could go on knitting and reading the Bible. Any minute they might die. But then, why should they not go on as they were ? It didn't much matter, after all. But to be contented—placidly contented—that was the marvel. One man spent all his days working to earn money enough to be miserable and hungry, to live in a dirty little cottage with a wife whom he beat. It was strange why people wanted to live. Yet they did—and generally grumbling or miserable or ill. An infinity of time seemed to have passed since the days when the hours sped by and he was reluctant to let each pass. He laughed to remember how he had gone to bed sometimes specially early that the next day might come more quickly with all its new joys. And now, one day dragged on slowly after another day and nowhere could he find distraction, not even duty ; and all his ingenuity was necessary to invent devices by which he could kill time ; and time he found to be a dull, immortal enemy.

Jane came into the room.

“There's a woman wants to speak with you, sir—a Mrs. Darteno.”

132 A Boy's Marriage

Blank surprise spread over Beverley's face—
"Mrs. ———?"

"Quite a respectable person."

"Oh yes, see what she wants." He spoke without interest. Jane's pronunciation obscured the visitor's identity. "Well, I suppose you'd better ask her in. I wonder what she can want."

"Help, I expect; you're the young squire, as one may say."

Pride sounded in Jane's voice; and with an air of importance she ushered in with a "Step this way, please."

Ajax rose and examined her, wagged his tail in approval, and returned to his usual place behind Beverley's chair.

Beverley had never seen Stephanie, and his mind through continual brooding had lost much of its quickness and interest. He was no longer on the alert to observe. So he resolved to give the woman money if she were in distress, and hear her story of misery. He could give money, but no longer sympathy; besides sympathy was futile, he knew that from experience.

"Won't you sit down?" he said, moving a chair round.

"Ah, I see you do not know who I am."

He started, and a vague excitement stirred within him at the foreign accent and sharp enun-

ciation. They sounded combative. Interest scattered his apathy; indeed, she was not a person with whom any one could long remain inert. Her vitality acted upon gloom like a strong wind upon fog.

"No, who are you?"

"I keep apartments in the town." She watched Beverley's face. "I knew your father long, very long ago." Her eyes did not move from him. He became confused and angry, realising who she must be.

"Why have you come here?" he asked.

"I still care for your father very much. Ah, you need not look ashamed. You must listen to me. It makes me mad, mad I tell you, that you should think ill of your father; he is a good man, a true man. You think I have no cause to meddle with him? That I've done enough mischief, but——"

"Perhaps I do," he interrupted coldly; then with growing resentment and rising voice he went on, "certainly what I think of my father has nothing to do with you. How dare you? How——"

Stephanie stood erect before him; her wrinkled, keen face was kindled with anger at his assumption of superiority and virtue.

"How I dare! how I dare!" she repeated;

and controlling herself with an effort. "Because I care for his happiness—yes, still I care for his happiness, and you are making him unhappy and you are unhappy yourself, and it is I, *c'est moi qui* . . . I do not want to be cause of . . . I that wish him and you only well with all that is in my heart ; and there is no reason, none at all, if you will be wise and not be, not be—what shall I say—*prejugé*—ah yes, prejudiced."

Beverley was bewildered with her earnestness ; the spell of her intense sincerity held him.

She sat down, and the keen look in her eyes gave way before a look of gentleness, and the tone of her voice became gentle.

"I know well how you love him, and how it is difficult to understand, but you shall hear ; you shall hear all, and you will no longer be unhappy that he knew me. I have not done him mischief."

There was no appeal in her voice, only a quiet conviction which impressed Beverley with the certainty she was speaking the truth. He wondered why he did not shrink from what he knew to be vice. What could be worse ? And yet—this motherly, earnest woman before him ! Why wasn't she draggled and slipshod and down at heel ? All his ideas seemed to be tottering ; there was nothing repulsive about her, though he

searched instinctively for something vile, something that would satisfy his idea of fitness. In the short silence he drew himself up on the thought that the wicked may prosper ; and at once remembering his own misery, became hardened again.

“What is there to tell? Besides, my father's private affairs——”

“But I want you to know the truth ; you will not judge then ; judge—it's for your sake and your father's sake. Believe me it is best. You think I was his mistress and now come to get money—blackmail—*hein* ?”

That had not occurred to Beverley before. He was not versed in the affairs of the world. Now it seemed more than probable. And suddenly the hope came that Eva would not come into the room or indeed know anything of the interview.

“But that is not the case. Oh no ; that is quite wrong. Ugly words—these are—mistress—immoral woman—but do not think of them—listen to me ; do not think I am speaking of your father. Listen to this story, with your mind open, as though it were the story of quite another person ; and do not make yourself hard. It is not an ugly story, not at all.”

While she was speaking he could not be half-

interested and half-condemning. He was obliged by the strong earnestness of her manner, emphasised by the abrupt foreign pronunciation, to be wholly interested.

“You have always lived in comfort. You do not know what it means to be alone in a big town—in lodgings. My mother kept lodgings. Two young men took the rooms. One was often out. He worked at the hospital. Well, the other was alone—very alone—and sometimes ill. And it is not good to be ill with no one to look after you—among strangers. Once he was very ill and I cherished him ; and he was gentle and grateful, and I used to talk with him and cheer him and I was very fond of him. Ah, I was young and nice to look at, and he caressed me and teased me, and I knew I would follow him anywhere in the world ; he was good and gentle. And he came to love me at last as I loved him. And he never felt lonely and sad after that. I did not worry him. It was shocking, you think ? He was happy, I tell you, and I was happy. And when you have lived longer you will know how much that means. Ah, *chéri*, he used to let down my hair ; it was long and black then——”

“But your mother, didn't she . . .”

“Ah, my mother—she is with the good God”

(rapidly she made the sign of the cross). "She saw all. She knew all. She warned me of the terrible things that might happen, how one must suffer for happiness, how a woman might suffer more than a man. But she knew that Monsieur was good. When I was sad she comforted me. Unnatural mother, *hein ?* She should have turned me from her doors, *hein ?* into the streets—ah, she was a good woman, and she knew that I had *caractère*. She was my Providence. I owe to her all, all."

"But when my—but when he went away. Didn't you mind?"

"Mind—oh, Monsieur—mind—you say! For weeks, for months, my eyes were red and my heart was heavy. I grew thin. He wanted to marry me; he was good. But I knew—knew my *métier*, and knew that it must end; that it must pass and that my grief perhaps must pass too. I would not marry him; we should both have been miserable, soon, quite soon, for ever. He was not in my class. Ah, my mother was wise; and I too had the brains and the spirit. I do not wish for pity."

She shrugged her shoulders in angry contempt.

"But your husband—you married."

"Ah, *qu'il est jeune !* I took good care of him and his house. Your ladies in society they

138 A Boy's Marriage

marry first and then take a lover ; we—we marry and are faithful—that is all. I know—my mother was in their service. Some women want love ; others children—two kinds. I have had both, and your mother has been happy. What harm has been done ?”

She spread out her hands at the question.

“She has been deceived,” he said abruptly, without thinking. He had for the moment forgotten his mother ; and she faded quickly again from his mind.

“And all these years you've cared ?”

“One cannot forget. One does not have so many friends in this life that one can forget the best, the very best. Many men—but your father is different. If he were not so good, you would not have known. I should never have been here. You will not let his goodness hurt him. You will not think him bad. I should not have come to these lodgings, so near, perhaps it was weak. But when one is alone, quite alone, it is nice, Monsieur, to feel that some one is living near you who is fond of you—so I came. When one is getting old and alone . . . and he wanted me to come.”

“I am glad you came. I—it's all right ; but things are strange—I'll tell the old governor, but if—oh I feel such an ass, such an ass.”

"There is something else that is worrying you" (she spoke very gently); "why—if I could—if Monsieur would let me help him; it would be such a big delight to me—such great joy."

"It's nothing, nothing. I am glad you came. It's done me good. Life's strange—utterly mad, utterly mad!"

He paced up and down the room. His mind was tingling, as a limb tingles that has been asleep. Wonder at the woman's devotion, disgust at his father's deceit, love for his father's goodness, and an indefinite horror of life—all fought for the chief place in his mind, and his own ignorance seemed the source from which all his feelings rose.

"Won't you have something to eat? You've had a long walk."

"Oh no; no, thank you. But I must go. Think kind thoughts, and—and God bless you."

He heard her open and close the front door, and was suddenly angry that he had not had the courtesy to let her out.

He went on pacing up and down the room. He felt the world was wicked, but he felt alive. He felt he had power and interest in life. Nothing came to a man who whined. Why think and worry, alone in his room, and smoke pipe after pipe, as though that were all life contained?

Eva—oh, he would easily make her care for him. Why should he sulk alone? Exhilaration lifted him out of himself, above all his gloom and doubt and sensitive suspicion of his motives. His spirit sped swiftly away from all facts far into the realm of his past dreams.

He went into the drawing-room, his face flushed and his eyes beaming with new joy.

But Eva had not passed through an experience that in any way broke through the crust of routine. She was sitting rather sadly, and feeling very small and lonely, in her large arm-chair. She could not keep her thoughts from straying towards depression, though she tried bravely to accept her position unquestioningly; for it was not yet in her nature to face a question and find an answer and act upon it. She had only intellect enough at present to wonder and accept. She had her ideas of how a lady should dress and how a lady should behave, but she never thought of herself as a woman. She kept the word for the lower classes, whom she visited, and to whom she thought it was proper to be kind. She was not at all self-conscious; when she did think of herself, she thought of a young lady pouring out tea in her drawing-room or taking a demure interest in roses. She never saw the girl who liked to run across a field, the

girl who liked to sleep with the blinds up. Had she ever described herself, she would have described a prig, and this she was far from being. But she was without imagination.

So it was natural that when Beverley burst into the room, joyful and excited, that she should ask him to close the door—quite quietly and without any trace of offence in her voice. And it was also natural that he should feel momentarily annoyed, almost repulsed. But his mood was too ardent to be easily quenched.

“How splendid you look in that white dress ! An absolute little darling,” he said, sitting on the arm of the chair and leaning over to kiss her.

She smiled at him. “You old goose, I’ve often worn it before.”

“Have you ! I’ve been sulking so horribly I’ve not noticed anything. Why do you let me sulk ? You should beat me.”

“I thought you must be angry with me.”

“Angry with you !”

“Yes, why were you ?” Her voice sank to a whisper. She was conscious that the moment was almost crucial. She felt very small ; and in her heart too pride came, and the knowledge that he had been unkind. She looked up into his face, and a terror unknown and compelling forced her to shrink involuntarily from him.

142 A Boy's Marriage

He seemed strange and wild. She was frightened—and alone. She loved him, but she was terrified of him, and the combat between love and terror went on within her.

He did not know what an effort it cost her to say—

“Be kind to me, dear.”

He merely thought she was cold-hearted and wanted him to go away, thoughts which he stifled within him. He put his arm round her and drew her to him, kissing her.

His kisses were selfish and therefore brutal, because he desired to take rather than to give delight. So she felt in his power, not in his heart. And she shrank from him.

“Do you love me?” he murmured.

“Yes,” she faltered.

Then Beverley's imagination, using the taint of selfishness, played him a base trick, and brought before his mind the picture of a girl letting down black hair, and the picture wounded and maddened him. There was silence, and the silence increased in Eva her sense of weak loneliness and terror. She began to speak confusedly, quickly, so that only occasional words were audible. Beverley listened. Through his mind's turmoil came the words—“Duty—your wife—submit.”

A Boy's Marriage 143

Disgust sickened him, disgust and loathing of himself. He felt base and lowered in her sight and his own, and with the disgust was mingled blind fury at he knew not what.

He strode out of the room and did not hear Eva's low cry of—

“Don't go, don't go.”

She heard his door slam, and a sense of relief came to her that she was by herself and of dismay that he left her in anger.

Ah, why could he not understand that she was frightened? She really longed to do anything to please him—she could not help being frightened, when he was so strange, when he ceased to be kind, and—oh, she would go and tell him she was only frightened. He was good really and loved her. She must just wait a minute for the trembling that was on her to pass away, and she would go, go at once. She could not bear him to be angry.

The door was opened. “Ajax,” called Beverley sharply. The dog was by the door and ran out.

Eva heard the hall door opened and pulled noisily to. Then all her strength forsook her and she burst into tears.

The night was dark and windy. Beverley took off his cap and let the warm strong wind blow through his hair and soothe his hot head.

The roads were muddy, but he splashed heedlessly on, obeying the impulse that led him to the sea. He wanted to hear the sea's restless force, the sound of the pebbles sucked back by the receding wave, and the wave's fine beat upon the shore. He must be near the ceaseless tumult of the sea, coming unseen from the darkness, stirred by the wind, that power that is only seen in its influence—on the swaying trees, in roused waves, the hurrying clouds; never visible, yet all-pervading—like Fate, like Love, like Death. Down the lane he sped, and soon he heard the low roar of the sea behind the near noise of the wind rushing through the lane's one hedge of thick hawthorn and over the wide open field into black space. He wanted to escape from himself, to lose his own misery in the great living darkness that swept over the land. He gulped deep breaths of the sweet air pantingly into his lungs. Suddenly a black cloud was moved away from the moon, and the moon unobscured shone forth small and still for a moment; he stopped and gazed up at her as she showed motionless the wild work of the wind among the clouds; then another black cloud passed and she was hidden. He took the last sharp curve of the lane, and the roar of the sea broke on him unimpeded, and the wind pressed hard against him, as he crunched

A Boy's Marriage 145

down the shelving slope of shingle towards a deep sheltered hollow by the largest groin. Here he crouched in immediate peace, while around him the elements continued to rage in large exuberance of power.

He cowered under the breakwater looking out into the tempestuous darkness. The wind was rising.

He felt despicable, baffled by his own feelings which found no response, and these feelings seemed to him at one moment beautiful and at the next indescribably foul. He saw that it was his own craving he had wanted to satisfy. The beast in him had gained the mastery ; or how otherwise could the image of another girl with black hair have risen within him, when he was making love to Eva ? Faugh ! Making love ! He was impure. He who had soared to such heights of rapture was but an ordinary foul-minded man, ruled by instinct, dominated by what was sensual. Well, and that was his nature ; and he had not even the strength to be himself—coarse and commonplace as he knew himself to be. He was weak, a paltry, weak fool. No wonder that he could not inspire love. What was there in him that any one could love ? Eva knew him now, and of course she shrank from him, though she was strong-minded enough to

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146 A Boy's Marriage

wish to do what had become a duty. How could she love him or care for him in any way, when he despised himself—and with such justice?

Why should he despise himself? Did not every man feel as he felt?

But he could find no comfort in a sense of injury.

He stood up and the wind swept against his head, and he longed that the wind, which had power to stir the sea, to snap an elm's great branch, might blow away the speck of dust that tortured his soul's eye to agony.

Slowly he walked home, tired with the wind's buffeting, and little by little the roar of the sea became a distant moan to his hearing.

XI

HIS life's routine was resumed next morning. The post brought a slight excitement in the shape of a small parcel of malodorous stuff, marked poison, for which Beverley had written in answer to an advertisement which he had seen in the paper—lauding its efficacy in destroying the little flies which swarm on certain trees and sting. A fir tree in the garden was pestered with them. He read the instructions printed on the packets—the amount of water in which the powder should be mixed, and how it should be burned in cases which allowed of fumigation.

Eva, glad to see him interested in anything, begged him to waste no time in treating the particular tree, adding, "quite a nice little job for you this afternoon." This remark made Beverley keenly conscious of the emptiness of his life, in which killing little flies with a quack preparation was a considerable event. So he said loftily—

"You might give it to John some time ; perhaps it'll do away with the pest." And proceeded to open his other letter.

148 A Boy's Marriage

It was from Mrs. Coltney Smith, and came as an entire surprise, since he had forgotten the existence of that lady. The letter was quite short and pleasantly worded, and informed him that she was coming to the Dover at the end of the week. She hoped that he would look her up if he were going to be in the neighbourhood. The letter roused many unpleasant thoughts in his mind. He was ashamed of the memory of his outbursts on poetry and life, to which she had listened with that inscrutable look on her face. His memory interpreted that look as an expression of mockery at his ignorance—quite wrongly, indeed. He was young enough to think that she would press home upon him the correctness of her experience, and would find pleasure in the little triumph of her opinion.

His ideal was not as dead as he thought. He fell back upon the comfort of illusion because he had been without the strength and without the knowledge to live up to that ideal.

He did not want to see her ; he knew how she would fit his case with a prompt label, glibly and with assurance, which would bring his sorrow to a commonplace level and make it more hideous. He clung to the distinction which his misery seemed to give him.

Just as he was finishing the paper, which he

read every morning in an aimless way without particular interest of any kind, Mr. Teruel leaned in at the study window, and Beverley started at the recollection of Mrs. Darténé's visit on the previous evening, and a certain look of diffidence on his father's face, like a mute reproach, made him feel most uncomfortable and remiss. So he called out, "I was just coming up to you ; that fellow's sent the stuff for the flies. I am glad you've looked in."

Mr. Teruel walked round to the front door, where he stopped to greet Eva. Beverley searched his mind for something to say, but when his father walked into the room with that slow, deliberate movement peculiar to him, he found nothing more significant to say than, "Hullo, dad, come in." That slow walk seemed symbolic, and gave him an odd pleasure and a great desire to laugh aloud—a desire which he knew to be indecorous and absurd.

Swiftly through Beverley's mind passed the image of the middle-aged, neat, and eminently respectable woman with whom he had spoken in the same room only the evening before, and he marvelled at his father. The dominant impression in him was one of sadness ; for it suddenly occurred to him, like a discovery, that such an experience could never come to his father again.

150 A Boy's Marriage

Age and memory only were left him. And he would die ; and he seemed quite content.

"How can you go on seeing her ?" he cried.

And Mr. Teruel, misunderstanding him naturally enough and having no wish to stand before a filial tribunal, said—

"What do you mean ?"

"Oh, after that glorious . . . and now it's so hopelessly humdrum. How can you go on living contentedly with—(he couldn't say 'mother')—us all, when—why we might be her children—I don't understand. How can you bear going gradually nearer and nearer——"

He stopped. He was about to say "death," but was too horrified.

"Explain to me," he went on, "what does life mean ? What does love mean ? Why should you——"

"Well ?"

"Oh, experience is so different ; one is so lonely always."

"I'm not quite following you. You should take things a bit more easily. The habit of worrying about trifles is a damned bad one, and grows too. After all, sonny, you've nothing very much to trouble you—have you ? Of course in one way your affairs don't concern me, you understand. But as a pal, as one man to

another—well—you've something on your mind, and perhaps, well we might talk about it."

"Dad, a fellow can't talk about his wife."

"No, of course not. You feel cooped up here. Why not see a bit of the world, why not travel? Knock about a little, and—why, then you could write a book about it. What's wrong with that? You see, my dear boy, women are queer creatures—you can't quite treat them as you would men. What they like is to look after a man——" (He spoke tentatively, trying to draw from Beverley an exact account of what he suspected to be some trivial tiff.) "They're different, you understand—a certain amount of management and they soon fit into their place, and are, what they are meant to be, a great comfort. Don't worry to find out what they want—they don't know themselves—why, bless you, let Eva know what *you* want—and she'll like to do it; selfish not to let her; shows you've need for a wife, for one thing; otherwise what's she doing in the house?"

He could gather nothing from Beverley's face as to how he took this advice—thrown out at random—so rapping his pipe against the mantel-piece, he said cheerily—

"Well, well, what I looked in about really was to know if you'd come with me to Arundel.

152 A Boy's Marriage

I'm going to have a look at the cattle—buy a heifer perhaps—and we'll lunch there."

"Yes, I'd like to come," said Beverley, who welcomed the change of topic. His father's remarks about women filled him with disgust, which he was anxious to conceal, though he realised their kindly intention.

He wondered what kind of person he would have been if Stephanie Dartené had been his mother.

"Good God, what a mess life is!" he thought to himself, as he went out of the room to find Eva and tell her that he would be out to lunch.

He suggested that she should go up to the Hall ; but Eva was pleased at the idea of having lunch by herself. It did not often happen that she was alone at a meal.

So she waved her hand to them as they drove by, and found she had just time for a short walk after she had put away the linen.

The fact that she had cried herself to sleep the previous night in no way affected her. She always awoke in the morning fresh and cheerful, and this morning she had wakened to find the sun streaming into the room, and as she dressed, a robin of whom she was fond had sung to her.

"At any rate *we* won't be gloomy, little Dicky B., will we ?" she had said.

She did not like Ajax: one reason for her dislike being that he had scratched the paint on the drawing-room door, and another that Beverley paid him a ridiculous amount of attention, she thought. However, as she went into the dining-room she heard whines coming from the study, and took pity upon him.

"If you behave nicely you shall be with me while I have lunch," she said. But he took no notice and hurried about trying to find his master. She coaxed him into the dining-room, but he lay down disconsolately by the door and turned away from the bread which she offered him.

His manner irritated her, and remembering how Beverley had come back the evening before to call the dog, she became exasperated.

"Come here, you stupid beast!" she cried out. Ajax did not even turn his head. So she got up and, taking him by the collar, led him from the door. He offered no resistance, but as soon as her hand left his collar, he quietly walked back to his former place.

She ignored him.

Her eyes fell on the small parcel which still lay where Beverley had put it on the mantelpiece—she instantly rose and rang the bell and said to the maid—

"I thought I'd told you to put that away in

the master's room. It looks most untidy. Don't let Ajax out of the room."

"Yes, ma'am," said the maid, and went up to the mantelpiece. Being a new maid and nervous, she dropped one packet, and falling upon the grate the paper burst and the yellow powder was scattered over the hearth-rug and fire-irons.

"How clumsy!" cried Eva. "No, don't stop to do that"—as the girl tried to clean it up with her hands. "But directly after you've brought my coffee, bring in a brush and pan and sweep it carefully up."

This little exercise of authority went some way towards restoring her good humour. There was something about the complete indifference of Ajax which was like a silent challenge and one which she was constrained to accept. She was determined to rouse a little affection in him. So she went up and patted him, and rubbed him behind the ear with one finger, with such success that, when she went back to the table, he followed her.

"Good old boy," she said, and put her hand on his head. At which he moved his stump of a tail. "We must be friends," and she cut off a piece of meat and held it on a fork in front of him. His eyes brightened as he looked at it and his nose worked approvingly.

"Round you go, then," and he raced round the table, coming back to his exact place and position. "Round you go again," and round he went again. He was excited and quivered with expectation, moving his front paws and half rising continually.

"After it then," and she whisked it off her fork, meaning to throw it a little way up in the air, but instead of going up it went sideways and fell into the yellow heap of powder on the hearth-rug. Before she realised what had happened, Ajax had snatched and swallowed it, and was sitting down licking his lips with a snap and requesting another piece.

"Oh, good heavens!" she cried out, watching for him to roll over in instant agony and die. But there he sat and seemed none the worse. She soon thought no more about it, and having finished her lunch, she shut him up once more in the study and went into her room, as it was a hot day, with a novel which she read and dozed over until the slam of the front door told her of the arrival of Beverley.

"Father's not bought a heifer. Look how the old chap's lapping up the water," said Beverley, as she came downstairs.

"Well, I expect he's thirsty."

For some reason her uneasiness returned ;

156 A Boy's Marriage

and there was sufficient irritation in her voice to make Beverley look up and say—

“Hullo, anything wrong?”

“No, of course not; come and have tea, it'll be ready by now.”

And she had the unpleasant sensation of having told an untruth.

She was obliged to look into the dining-room and see if the powder had been swept up. She was relieved to find that no trace of it was visible.

Marion came to tea.

There seemed to Eva a fatality in the direction the conversation invariably took. First Marion said how nice it would be when they were able to take tea under the fir; and it was all Eva could do to prevent Beverley from fetching the packets of the fly-destroyer in, to show her the instructions. Then Beverley asked her why she kept looking so furtively at Ajax, and Marion said she thought that the poor dog felt the heat in his thick coat; and Eva found herself drawn further and further into a veritable maze of deceit. She became more and more agitated the more she tried to be composed, and she kept assuring herself that it was absurd, and her own fancy, and wishing with all her heart that she had told Beverley about the occurrence as soon as she had seen him. That was now impossible.

Moreover, any change from her accustomed cheerfulness was unusual ; and Beverley at once noticed the change and kept asking her what was the matter, until she could have boxed his ears at his continual refusal to understand that nothing at all was the matter. Every movement of Ajax seemed boding and peculiar.

Directly she finished her tea she went away, saying that she wanted to see to one or two things in the house of her aunt, who was expected in two days' time.

"And I know Marion has a lot to say to you, haven't you, dear?" she said, as she left the room.

"How sweet of her," said Marion as the door closed.

She did want very much to talk with Beverley, whom she seldom saw now alone, and who she felt was drifting away from her, for some reason to her inexplicable. She was determined to make an effort to regain his confidence.

Beverley knew this instinctively and shrank from the ordeal. He got up at once and said, with all the brightness he could muster—his voice in consequence sounded loud and unnatural to himself and to his sister—

"Come on ; let's have a look at that stuff, shall we?"

158 A Boy's Marriage

"When's Bruce coming!" said Marion, not moving from her chair.

"Oh, in about a week."

"It will be nice for you having him; and he'll want to see you after——"

"All this sickening sentiment and curiosity," thought Beverley. "Why can't people be simple and natural, and not pry into one's affairs."

What he would have welcomed once as sympathy, he now resented as intrusion. It was assuredly painful enough to realise the state of his own mind, intolerable for another to see it and despise him, as he despised himself; contempt he could not face. He tried hard to bluff himself by continual hypocrisy—not quite hypocrisy: rather he hoped that the part he was playing for the benefit of his family would become real to himself by constant practice. He found any part exceedingly difficult, because until now he had been scrupulously sincere, having had no need to be anything but himself. Now anything was preferable to that.

"Read to me a little," said Marion.

"Whatever shall I read?" said Beverley, knowing perfectly well that Marion wanted him to read poetry. "Besides, I'm not in the mood."

"You're never in the mood," said Marion gently. "Why aren't you? Couldn't you tell

me, dear? You know I miss you—your love,” she went on in a low voice.

The absence of all reproach in her voice hurt him.

“Why should you think I’ve changed to you? I haven’t. Things aren’t easy—I’m soft . . . you’ve no right to reproach me—I must face things myself . . . I detest all this messing about with one’s feelings. You *must* always care for me.”

He jerked this out. The covering of restraint was lightly on him and the least thing served to take it away and reveal the ferment within. Nothing was in proportion.

Marion got up and kissed him on the forehead.

“Don’t forget how very dear you are to me.”

“It’s no good,” thought Beverley. “Every one will know. Father, Marion know already, Bruce will when he comes—that I’m just unhappily married.” The commonplace of it was dreadful; and he longed to get away from every one, to go right away to a place where none knew him, and with that desire came the horror of the loneliness that would always shut him in.

“Come on,” he said, “let’s go out. We’ll fetch Eva. She’s nothing to do there really;

160 A Boy's Marriage

and we'll all go down to the sea. I shall take towels and things, and if it looks tempting, have a dip."

"Yes, do ; it'll cheer you up."

"Cheer me up, you absurd old woman," he said, putting his arm round her, "there's nothing wrong with me."

"Well, there is with Ajax ; just look at him."

At first she spoke lightly, but there was alarm in her last words.

Ajax rolled over as she spoke, and his hind legs twitched convulsively and his jaws began to snap.

"Good God, whatever is it ?"

They looked at him in consternation, as he lay struggling on the floor.

"I'll go for the vet."

"No, I will ; you wait here and do what you can."

"But what—what——"

His struggles increased . . . gradually they grew less convulsive.

He moved his head so that he could see Beverley, looking at him as though he asked for help. He kept his eyes on him appealingly. Beverley stood motionless and watched, not knowing how tightly he held Marion's arm between his fingers ; he watched the look of

appeal give way to a glassy look without any recognition in it.

"He's dying, Marion."

Ajax lay still. He was dead. When Beverley was able to move, and running up to him put his hand on the dog's heart, there was warmth in the body.

"Oh, Ajax, Ajax," he whispered, combing his fingers through the long grey hair. He only realised his lifelessness because Ajax for the first time made no response to his caress.

He knelt over him . . . Marion laid her hand on his shoulder and said, "Come away, dear." Then tears came into his eyes.

As he rose, one of his front paws caught in the pocket of his coat and fell back limply on the floor with a little thud that made Beverley shudder.

"Marion, he doesn't know me," he said under his breath, frightened.

"Come away, dear," she said, pulling him gently by the arm.

But at that moment the door from the garden opened, and Eva came quickly through the hall and danced into the room exclaiming—

"Oh, such fun," then she saw something had happened—realised what it was. Terrified, she ran up to Beverley and began talking wildly.

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"It wasn't my fault, it wasn't my fault—I meant to tell you ; but I thought it was nothing. Oh, don't look at me like that—I was just as fond of him as you were—really I was. I wouldn't have done anything to hurt him. It was all a mistake, an accident. I did mean to tell you and I thought you'd be angry—it fell into that yellow stuff and he ate it up before I could stop him—the girl dropped the packet and it burst. Don't look at me like that—as though you thought I'd poisoned him. It's not right of you to think that, I only hated him for a moment because he was always with you so much."

"What do you mean—what happened?" said Beverley, with an effort. "It doesn't much matter though, he's dead now, you see."

And stooping over Ajax he lifted him in his arms and trying to prevent his head from hanging down, carried him from the room.

Eva burst into tears—uncontrollably.

"I know he thinks I poisoned him—I didn't, I didn't—only why didn't I tell him at once? and something might have been done—now it's too late—oh, what shall I do——"

"Hush," said Marion. "You mustn't talk like that. Of course he won't think anything of the kind ; of course we know it wasn't your fault."

A Boy's Marriage 163

"It was my fault, not my real fault—I couldn't tell him at once—I couldn't bear him to dislike me more—it's too awful—and how could I know this would happen—and now he'll never care for me," she sobbed. "Tell him I want to speak to him."

"Wouldn't it be better to leave him alone, dear, just now?"

"Oh, do tell him I want to speak to him," begged Eva, with the insistence of a child.

So Marion went into the study. She was away a long time. At first Eva continued to sob; but gradually her grief gave way before anger at her own ill-usage—left alone when she was so miserable. And she began to resent the fuss that was being made over a dog. Of course, she thought, it was horrible to see the dead creature lying on the floor of the drawing-room. But after all it was no such terrible tragedy. She had been very sorry and shown how sorry she was. Besides, there was an excellent shop in Arundel where he could be stuffed nicely, and it was quite easy to get another dog like him. They were neither expensive nor rare. And she began to think where would be a good place in the study for him to stand—stuffed. Or perhaps they could make a nice mat out of his skin, and that would lie, of course, by the little writing-

table, and there could be a neat inscription about a faithful friend and warm feet after his death or something appropriate, which would show that the dog was not forgotten. There was no need at all for Beverley to work himself up into such a state. At any rate her duty was plain—to be sensible.

So when Marion came back she was surprised to see Eva quite restored to her usual spirits.

“Go in and see him,” she said.

“Yes, I will at once,” Eva answered briskly, and she walked out determinedly.

But in the hall her determination forsook her at the thought of the part she had taken in this—accident. What if Beverley suspected she had killed the dog on purpose? All the little speeches she had prepared immediately became pointless. She went into the room.

Beverley was standing in front of the mantelpiece. That disconcerted her. She had expected him to be sitting with his head in his hands. She did not see the body, and dared not look about for it. Horror of it possessed her.

“What have you done with it?” she asked in a frightened whisper.

He turned his head and she saw something in a dark corner; and a feeling of actual sickness crept upon her.

A Boy's Marriage 165

"Tell me how it happened?" asked Beverley. His voice sounded tired.

"Some other time, some other time—I can't stay in the room with it—I can't really."

"I shall bury him as soon as it is quite dark; I couldn't in the light."

"It wasn't my fault," said Eva, retreating to the door; she could not remain in the room a moment longer.

"I don't understand. You didn't poison him, I suppose. He's dead now; it doesn't really much matter how it happened."

There was the same utter indifference in his voice.

"Oh, don't stop in the room with it," said Eva. It was a relief—indescribable—for her to be out of the room—she ran upstairs as fast as she could.

Marion saw her disappear and went in to her brother.

"Good-bye, dear," she said, and stroked the hand which he held out to her. He felt the sympathy in her caress and it comforted him.

"When it's dark I shall bury him," he said.

She nodded and went away.

Beverley took out his watch and held it some time in his hand, and without looking at it put it back again in his pocket.

166 A Boy's Marriage

He felt tired—worn out. The shock seemed to have dazed him. He wanted the day to end. The light was insolent. He took out his watch again and saw that it was nearly seven.

He rang and said he would have no dinner.

Two more hours at least, he thought ; and he sat down at full length in his chair to wait for darkness.

At last darkness came.

Beverley, going from his dark study into the bright light of the hall where the lamps were lit, was dazzled, and outside he stumbled against the box-tree edge of the path on his way to the shed where the spade was kept.

He found the ground by the fir trees at the end of the garden too hard and full of roots ; so at the far end of the potato patch he began to dig.

Very slowly the work proceeded ; he had forgotten to put on his boots, and his slippers were thin and soon became soft with the mud and kept falling off into the hole. He could not go into the house again and change them. He dug on feverishly, bruising his feet against the iron spade and sweating. He had not realised how long it took to dig a hole deep enough. Great stones continually came in his way ; and on his knees he groped in the soil with his hands to

A Boy's Marriage 167

find a hold on them, and he cut his fingers against sharp edges and they bled. Once he stooped and put all his strength into the moving of a stone, and the stone was not firmly embedded and yielded at once, so that he lost his balance and fell backwards. He seemed to hear mocking laughter ; and tears were mingled with the sweat that dripped from his face. He dug on in despair—interminably.

Worn out, he walked to the house rapidly to fetch the body while his resolution lasted—terrified lest he should give way.

He lifted Ajax—quite stiff the body was—and carried him out. He staggered as he walked. He dreaded that the hole might not be large enough. It would be horrible to dig again—with the body lying by him.

But the hole was large enough.

Ajax lay in it huddled. He was obliged to force down his paws ; they stuck up so. His breath came in gasps as he shovelled the earth over him. It fell loosely and, not thinking, he pressed his foot hard on the mould to make it compact, and in doing so he felt the body through his thin slippers, soft with mud. He would have screamed, but he had no voice. He stood still, sickened by the feel of the body. Then he sought for large stones and flung them on the loose earth, and

168 A Boy's Marriage

trampled on them and trampled—forcing himself to overcome the whirling in his head ; and he filled in the grave, beating the earth flat savagely with the back of his spade, and the remainder of the soil he scattered on all sides.

Then he looked at the grave ; his head swam, and he lost consciousness.

He did not lie there long. Gradually his senses returned, and he began to wonder where he was and what was feeling cold to his cheek ; and he realised it was the damp earth and remembered.

So he got up and steadying himself on the spade, which was still in his hand, he made his way back to the house.

Jane was waiting for him in the hall, and in a whisper, because the hour was later than she was accustomed to, said, treating him as she used to treat him when he was a little boy—

“Now come, sonny, don't take on so ; there's a nice hot bath waiting for him, and his old Nan will bring him something hot and comfy to take when he's in bed.”

And he smiled with tears in his eyes and obeyed her. He was more tractable than when he was a little boy.

Meanwhile John, the gardener, came back with his son. Having heard of the calamity, he

A Boy's Marriage 169

had come out before to offer assistance. But seeing how upset Beverley was, he had withdrawn without being noticed. Now he returned carrying a sack, his son a shovel and pick. Deftly he loosened the earth again, took out the body, deepened the hole, poured in lime, put back the body, poured in more lime, and rapidly filled in the hole again.

"That's a little more shipshape anyhow," he said to his son. His son spat thoughtfully and nodded.

XII

BEVERLEY never spoke with Eva about the events of that day. She wanted to proclaim to him her innocence, but she had not the courage to broach the subject of her own accord. Moreover, she was deceived by the change in Beverley : for a horror of solitude took possession of him, and he availed himself of any means to escape the sway of his own thoughts. He always played some game after dinner, draughts with her or chess with Mr. Teruel ; he was ceaselessly on the move, and she mistook the meaning of this restlessness. He tried to wear himself out during the day that he might sleep at night. He counted the days till the arrival of Bruce, with whom he could play tennis—not to enjoy the game, but as a means of fatigue. And he was disappointed when Bruce put off his coming.

One afternoon he found himself with nothing to do. His father was not well enough to go out as they had arranged, and the others were driving to pay a call. He must do something, and sud-

A Boy's Marriage 171

denly the idea of seeing Mrs. Coltney Smith came to him. He had no dread of her now. He welcomed the excitement.

So he started off to walk to the Dover. A poignant memory cut him, as he passed the stile where his father had met him with the telegram, as he went through the field where Ajax had chased the rabbit. A year ago—he pretended not to feel the stab of memory, but unconsciously he quickened his pace, as though to escape from his own past.

It was a splendid day of sun ; a blue sky overhead, the blue of which faded on the horizon to the leaden-coloured haze of heat. The low-toned cry of the moorhens was the proper expression of the day's sultry mood. But Beverley heard nothing, and saw nothing, except casually. He was quite callous—like a stranger who is tired of a strange land with which he has become hatefully familiar.

He passed a man who was trimming a hedge, and the man stopped work and looked at him, idly wondering, as he laid down his long-stemmed sickle and wiped his forehead. "Well, there's all sorts," no doubt he thought, and went on with his job.

As he walked underneath the arch of roses that circled the small gate of the Dover, he saw

Farina sitting in the sun ; no change had taken place here, and Mrs. Coltney Smith came out from the house before he had time to ring, with welcome on her face, exactly as though only two days had passed since his last visit.

"Well, at last," she said ; "and how are you ? I am delighted that you have come to-day. Yes, here I am : come to settle down for a little peace again. And how is the dear little lady your wife ?"

"Oh, very well, thank you."

She felt his uneasiness without needing to look at him.

"The old illusion," she thought, and suggested that he should bring out another chair.

"I look forward so to seeing your new house ; and of course you are very happy ; and I think it is quite charming of you to have come so soon. But where is that dear grey dog ?"

"He's dead."

"Oh, I am sorry," she said. The mask of her manner fell from her, and Beverley felt the kindness in her voice, suddenly quite soft and, as he would have said, quite natural. "No other dog can take his place—ever. You have the memory of his devotion, dear : a beautiful memory, that. Life is the gathering of memories—fair and ugly."

Tears came into his eyes at her unexpected sympathy. He said nothing. She leaned forward and stroked his hand, saying very gently, "Try and not grieve, dear."

He knew that she could be gentle, but he had no idea that she could be so gentle as this. She seemed to possess a new beauty, which something had kept veiled from him up till now ; she became something more than a magnificent woman whom he feared and wondered at, something more than a vague embodiment of distinction ; her gentleness made him worship her.

The moment passed. He heard her ordinary voice saying—

"Ah, here is tea—you'd better sit in a higher chair, up to the table, and then you can spread jam on your bread and butter, cherry jam, which I assure you is quite excellent."

"Jam for tea is splendid," he said.

He had a long talk with her, and went away roused out of all recognition, feeling that he had escaped from the burden of his persistent gloom. There seemed some point in life. What that point precisely was he did not know or care to know. She had told him the outline of a story which she was going to write, and he had taken the idea and declared that it ought to be worked out in a different way to that which she suggested.

174 A Boy's Marriage

He was going to write his idea, and she hers, and they were going to compare the two. His brain seemed to revel with thoughts, and he hurried back, keen to express them.

The friendship became close between them. He never told of his previous despair and apathy; he was too ashamed to speak of it, and he felt that she understood without being told. She found his worship and utter faith in her genius stimulating. She had never known a very young man. This she told him one day, and it made him laugh.

She called at the Lodge one afternoon just before Bruce arrived. And Eva showed her all over the house, which she praised to Eva's delight, in spite of the fact that Eva resented in her heart Beverley's glowing admiration, which he took no pains whatever to conceal in any way. He never looked so alert and interested when he spoke to her. She noticed this quite unconsciously; and she found it more and more difficult to be cheerful, although she was pleased that Beverley seemed alive and happy again. Mrs. Coltney Smith's charm drove this uneasiness entirely away; but after she had gone she came near to realising her own jealousy. She did not for a moment imagine that Beverley was in love with Mrs. Coltney Smith, but she tacitly disliked

her possession of qualities which she knew that she herself was without.

When Bruce came, he found nothing amiss at first. From Beverley's occasional letters he gathered that his young friend was settling down into comfort, as he expected ; indeed, his own work and life prevented him from thinking very much about him or any one else. Nor was he a man idly to confess himself wrong in any of his judgments. Naturally a large number of men had disappointed him ; that happened when they ceased to fit his moral measure, and then he was pained but inexorable.

The first evenings were filled up with talk of college days and what the different men of their year were doing or would do. Beverley wanted to find out how long Bruce intended to stay, but he was quite vague on that point. He always had a good reason for the least thing he did, and the reason for his vagueness was a little difficult to explain, even if he had wanted to, which he did not. The fact was, he hoped that he might fall in love with Marion. Hitherto he had fled the slightest intimacy with any woman ; but now he was in a position to marry, and his reason pointed to rich old Teruel's daughter as a suitable girl. But Bruce believed also in love. He felt rather frightened at this unknown quantity,

176 A Boy's Marriage

but had determined to make opportunities to be alone with Marion and let things take their course. At any rate, there could be no imbroglia of any kind.

So when after tennis one afternoon Beverley remarked that he thought he would bicycle up to the Dover for tea, Bruce said, "Do," and was glad to be able to be alone with Marion, whose charm he felt spreading over him.

But one morning Beverley backed out of a picnic that was being arranged, and Eva snapped out, "Oh, I suppose you are going to the Dover." And Beverley said that was quite possible or that he might write. Then Bruce became on the alert, and determined that he must not let him make an ass of himself. That was his duty—an unpleasant duty he assured himself—but still his plain duty. Now Bruce was inclined to look upon tact (a quality which he did not possess) as hypocrisy; and was proud of his blunt truth-telling, which was apt to be clumsy, though of course it was downright and honest. He never minced matters, and a hash was generally the result. This perhaps accounted for his opinion that most men were squeamish, weak creatures.

So that evening as he lighted his pipe he began—

"Look here, you know I never beat round the bush——"

"You absurd old chap, of course I know that," said Beverley, with disconcerting gaiety, clapping him on the knee ; which made Bruce even sterner and more peremptory than he intended.

"Well, why the devil do you spend so much time gallivanting after that Coltnay woman——"

Beverley started. His first impulse was to tell Bruce in violent terms to mind his own business ; but his real affection for Bruce overcame that impulse. Bruce, too, was his guest, and invariably meant well ; besides, this was Bruce all over—his friend. So he lightly poked him in the soft place of his stomach with one finger and laughed—

"Good old Napoleon—don't spare me."

This did not tend to mollify indignation ; Bruce blundered on—

"Of course if you like to be the pastime of a society woman, a platonic friendship as I suppose you call it, there's no more to be said ; but I think it's a pity, and I think Eva is perfectly justified in her obvious annoyance. You're making an absurd young ass of yourself, and you ought to give it up ; a married man has responsibilities, and it seems that I must point them out to you."

N

178 A Boy's Marriage

He put a sneering emphasis on the last word.

"It's not my nature to shirk unpleasant duties."

"No, I know."

Beverley was amazed to realise that his former dread of Bruce's opinion no longer existed. He thought of him now merely as a well-meaning old fellow. The reason of that change occupied his thoughts so that he did not think either of the impertinence or the insult of his interference.

"None of your family seem to have the common sense or the courage to put you on your guard, so it devolves upon me."

"Tut—bad luck," muttered Beverley, and was immediately glad that Bruce did not hear.

"Of course I know there is no real scandal or anything serious yet; but you are an impulsive young ass and might get into quite an unpleasant mess. And I'm too fond of you to let you do so without lifting a hand to prevent it. Take my advice and leave that woman alone. Those society women are utterly unscrupulous and——"

"Curse me as much as you like; not her, please——"

"——lead perfectly useless lives and waste the lives of——"

"I won't have it."

"——any man they can get hold of."

Nothing could deter Bruce from finishing a sentence already in his head. He had what is called moral courage and strength of character. The mole is blind, but has a fine capacity for growing.

Everley paced up and down the room trying to control his excitement. He wanted to tell the truth about his character, which he saw suddenly in a clear light. But instinct showed him the futility of such a step, that it might even be fatal to a friendship which in his heart he valued.

"You must let me go my own way. Your interference is intolerable. You understand nothing about the circumstances of the case, or how Mrs. Coltny Smith has helped me to get through great troubles."

"What troubles have you?" sneered Bruce.

"None that you would understand; you must respect me. It sounds funny, but it is absolutely true; no man has a right to try and arrange the life of another man, whoever he may be. Don't do it, don't do it. I'm so fond of you——"

"Are you? You seemed to have changed."

"Yes, I have changed, I'm more of a man;

180 A Boy's Marriage

but I've not changed in my affection to you, and I don't think I ever shall."

"Well, I think you're a damned young fool, though you are more of a man. But that needn't make any difference in our friendship. I've only warned you. If I hadn't looked upon you as a friend, I shouldn't have troubled ; it's not a particularly pleasant thing to have to do. I should have thought you could have seen that yourself."

"Dear old Napoleon," laughed Beverley. "Give me your hairy old hand."

And he undid the hands that were knit behind Bruce's head and shook one of them warmly, saying—

"Eva won't have any cause to divorce me yet, at any rate, and when she does I'll make a point of coming to you that you can have the joy of saying 'I told you so.' Come on, we'll go and make the old pater play nap."

"And you're a married man," said Bruce, half smiling.

Eva, however, felt that Beverley had widened the distance between them after the death of Ajax ; and now her resentment, which he ignored, drew her back from him until her distress at his complete withdrawal from her influence made her miserable, whenever she

thought of it. That fortunately was seldom. She was much in Mrs. Teruel's company at this time. She found that placid lady a great comfort, because she knew exactly how to please her, and she took a deep interest in all household matters. She used to read aloud to the old lady books of Miss Bellton, which they both liked immensely, while she knitted away in industrious preparation for her day of reckoning.

At one of these parties Mrs. Teruel eyed her daughter-in-law twinklingly over her spectacles and said, "I hoped to have made you a little vest, my dear, by now ; and two of the softest blankets I have ever knitted. Ah, your pretty little face need not go red ; surely I am like a mother to you."

Eva sat down by Mrs. Teruel and hid her face in her lap.

"Perhaps—perhaps——"

"Eh, dearie, I'm glad, proud——"

"Oh no ! not that ; but I should like a——"

"I know you would—that's my own brave girl ; and she'll tell me the beautiful secret as soon as ever she knows, won't she ?"

Eva longed to ask her mother-in-law for knowledge. At the back of her heart she often thought how nice it would be to have a baby to nurse and tend ; but her ignorance of the

simplest facts was complete. She wondered why this natural wish of hers should be brave. With an effort she managed to falter—

“I know nothing,” hoping her mother-in-law would understand. But Mrs. Teruel imagined that she meant—nothing about the management of a baby. So she broke out into a long discourse on her pet theories of diet and clothing, and when the proper time was for a child to be weaned.

“A good well-made girl like yourself, dearie, has nothing to fear, especially with me here, knowing everything; and of course you'll be able to nurse him yourself. Oh, it'll be a boy, bless him, and I shall be his own grandmother. A healthy woman, that's why I was so glad my dear son married you. The trouble and anxiety one of these weakly creatures is, God knows, and one like myself, who's seen—trouble to themselves and all concerned—ailing—sickly. But you—bless you——” She put her arms round Eva and hugged her, leaning down to kiss her head in motherly rapture.

After this Eva was tongue-tied—and quite naturally—concerning the matters about which she wanted to be enlightened; but the idea of a baby was more prominent in her mind after that talk, and occasionally Mrs. Teruel would throw

her a questioning glance, which Eva would answer by a blush and a shake of her head.

But Beverley knew nothing of what was in Eva's mind, and did not give a thought to her occasional display of dislike to his friendship with Mrs. Coltney Smith. No one—Eva less than any—could understand how vital was her influence in rousing him from his apathy ; he could not fathom the reason himself, and did not try to. He merely felt thriving, as after a bare winter a young tree thrives under spring sunshine.

The blunt remonstrance of Bruce only quickened his growing self-confidence—he so easily stepped over his dull warning.

Her image seemed to stand before all his mind's approaches to despair and direct his thoughts towards joy. His grief for Ajax was soothed and made tolerable. For had not his death brought him within sight of her hidden gentleness ? Beauty lurked everywhere, but was only visible to the man who was at the pains to seek.

Naturally he was too occupied to notice how matters fared between Bruce and Marion. Love and Bruce were not ever connected in his mind.

But Marion found Bruce's society very pleasant. She saw his slight tendency to heaviness,

but found it was quite easy to make him human by judiciously laughing at him. Once in an abandoned moment he had almost kissed her. He did not know that Marion noticed this, and wondered what prevented him. The fact was he was constitutionally shy ; he told himself that he loved orderliness and hated impulse.

Beverley had made up his mind to work at regular hours directly Bruce was off his hands, and his first step was to rout out the sheets of the novel which he had begun and burn them in the kitchen fire. He wrote little poems and studied the sonnet form zealously.

One evening he was restless and excited, and went out into the garden. It was a wonderful sight : everything was bewitched by the cool light of the moon. He wandered out into the road, where the beauty held him ; the peace of the evening became the peace in his soul ; and the whispering of the trees made the silence seem more still. Again and again the lines of Shelley passed through his mind like a refrain—

Death is the veil which those who live call life ;
They sleep, and it is lifted.

He did not know why, for he had not been reading Shelley lately. No train of thought led to them. They came from the dark places of his

A Boy's Marriage 185

memory, called by some secret power of the night, as though they were his soul's response to the stillness and the beauty. They were with him, mysterious as the fragrance of a violet.

Quietly he walked and almost held his breath, unconsciously and in a dream yielding to the influence.

They sleep, and it is lifted.

Towards the sea he went. Once he stopped and said the words to himself as softly as his voice could speak, pausing a long while after "they sleep," and smiling as he said "and it is lifted." It seemed a secret known only to himself and to the moon, who surely seemed to understand how her white, silent influence shone in his heart as her light brought a deeper peace upon all that was growing from the earth. She reigned, and held the winds under her control, that she might take full delight from the power of putting her own bright seal upon the earth's great quiet. The large moods of nature find a little counterpart in the moods of a man's mind, and a man may break down the barriers that shut him into his little self, and so become one with the greatness of things.

Beverley was young and sensitive ; he was caught by a spell ; he faced no facts and knew

nothing. He yielded unconsciously to the spell, but he drew little strength from his experience of beauty. While it lasted the beauty was none the less beautiful to him ; it was, however, the illusion of beauty. For some understanding of actual life and great strength is needed to make that beauty a reality—and it then becomes the chief reality.

Youth drinks in the beauty as his right, witlessly ; then life takes hold of him, and the man either clamours aloud about illusion, or understands the reality and value of beauty even in the teeth of envioning brutality.

Only a discerning eye is needed : the mystery of beauty is eternal. But it is hard to keep the eye of the soul unclouded by the dust of apathy or content or despair, in the ceaseless struggle which is life.

So Beverley walked on in ecstasy towards the sea. He passed a pony, nibbling the dew-drenched grass by the roadside, near the tamarisk bushes that skirted the shore ; and he noticed neither the pony nor the chaise to which the pony was harnessed. They were in the dark shadow of the tall hedge.

The tide in an hour would be high, and the sea was lapping gently on the sand, a few paces from the steep slope of shingle. He walked

down to the wet sand that was glistening in the moon's light, and looked out to the wide sea along the white straight line of the moon's rays that streamed across the sea.

The wind breathed softly on his face, as he stood listening. Then he shivered slightly and felt the presence of some one. He started and listened and turned.

The moon shone upon her ; she was standing up, a lace shawl was over her head and a lace wrap round her shoulders. It was his Lady of the Woods ; he was allowed to call her that now. She beckoned to him.

The meaning of the strange impulse that had lured him towards the sea became distinct in a moment as he walked to her.

"I knew you were here," he said in a low voice, stooping to kiss her hand. She laughed softly and they sat down on a large fur rug.

"I could not have imagined anything more beautiful than to be led by some unknown force to you on such an evening ; to have a friend to whom I am so near that I can come straight to her and sit by her—without one false note jarring on the beauty—quite naturally and simply. And it is splendid that she is such a beautiful friend."

"You are a strange boy—and very dear."

188 A Boy's Marriage

He lifted her hand that lay near him, and she let him stroke it gently.

"Tell me : it is more beautiful because I am here?" She smiled, but he persisted ; she said—

"Yes, of course, you have such feeling for beauty, you see."

"Is that why you are fond of me? It is, isn't it?"

"Yes, you're so young and so different to the men I have known. They all know exactly what they want and all make for it."

"Don't speak about them—now—it's horrible—how could you?"

"Oh, it's all life—you know—all life," she said dreamily, and continued, speaking rather to herself than to him—

"You don't seem a part of life—like nothing that I, at least, have met in life ; you resemble some fairy creature, fragile : that is your charm and your misfortune, perhaps ; to me you are something very like a dream, restful as a beautiful dream. You give me peace, you are so unreal. Just now as you stood looking out towards the sea, I almost fancied a mermaid would swim up and take you away in her arms."

"My Lady of the Woods came for me instead."

"Perhaps I ought not to have come into your life," she went on, not heeding his remark. "I am so different from what you think me ; I might hurt you ; and then I could never forgive myself."

"Oh no, you couldn't, you couldn't."

The idea did not trouble him for an instant. But sadness touched the heart of the lady. And she was silent—brooding.

He longed to dispel this sadness ; so many reasons thronged his mind, all convincing reasons, that he knew not which to utter.

"All I want is to bring a little more beauty into your life. I want you to connect me in your heart with the woods, and trees, and the roses, and your time of quiet and all that is beautiful in your life—oh, it's so hard to say what I mean ; and I like best, I like fearfully, that you should think of me as a fairy creature. Do you understand ?"

"Yes, dear."

"It is with you that I seem to live ; with other people I seem to be watching and take no part, as though they were puppets—and I know exactly what to say to please them. I don't feel above them. I'm fond of them ; but I only say what they expect me to say, and I listen to myself as I listen to one of them. Sometimes

190 A Boy's Marriage

with Marion I can't say what she wants me to say. Then I have to go, and she looks sad. But I can't help it—you're the only person to whom I can speak quite openly; you understand everything. With you I seem to be living. So you don't mind letting me love you, do you?"

"Ah, dearie."

They were silent. The little waves were rippling against the shingle now, and the great sea quivered with joy in the moonlight.

"We're at one with the silence," he whispered, leaning towards her.

"Yes."

She moved her head so that her cheek touched his, softly cool and sweet. And his heart beat fast with delight that she was so near to him. He closed his eyes as though to prolong and intensify that moment in order that it might be in his possession for ever.

Then she put her arms gently round him and gently kissed his forehead and his hair and his eyes.

He felt her breath on his face.

"Come," she said, "I can drive you along the lane, I must go back to my woods again, now."

As they drove home Mrs. Coltney Smith

wondered if she were wronging the boy, whether he were deceiving himself, whether behind this visionary beauty lurked misery, after the moment's spell had passed. Was the position a fair one? Ought she to try and make him understand what kind of disillusioned woman she in reality was? She looked at him without turning her head, and saw him wrapped away in the ecstasy of his dream; she had not the heart to waken him from it.

She pulled up the pony at the end of the lane and he got out.

"Hasn't it been beautiful! You'll always remember this evening: the moonlight and the sea and——"

His voice was trembling.

"Yes, always; just because it's so completely outside my life in London."

"What do I care about your life in London as long as you are my dearest Lady of the Woods? The mystery of it makes it more wonderful."

"It's just that I am hard and disillusioned."

"Are you? Not with me——"

He was incredulous.

"I may hurt you——"

"Never. How absurd. Tell me you've enjoyed this evening."

192 A Boy's Marriage

"More than you can possibly understand.
Good night, dear."

He watched her drive away—at the bend of the road she turned and kissed her hand to him.

XIII

UNDOUBTEDLY Beverley's evil genius was laughing at his great affection for Mrs. Coltney Smith, because the beauty he found in their friendship did not help him to face the facts of his life, but blinded him to their existence. Life soon scatters the fragile substance of a dream. The awakening inevitably comes ; and the awakening is not pleasant.

His tragedy was to be married to a girl for whom he had ceased to care. The new beauty did not inspire him with strength to face his position and decide upon some resolute attitude. It lifted him fatally away from all reality, and made him less able to cope with it—not more able, as such beauty might. He did not realise his selfishness in shirking the responsibility which his marriage brought, and Eva's apparent content only stimulated his self-deception. Habit led him to accept her presence.

Slowly, however, a change was taking place in Eva. The novelty of possessing and keeping

a house of her own was fading. As Beverley's quiet aloofness from her became more noticeable, she realised that this was no small tantrum which she could live down by her cheerfulness, but something more vital, the nature of which she was at a loss to understand. Her consciousness of it was too vague, and easily silenced by his courtesy and easy kindness. For the first time in her life—she was still barely nineteen—she was troubled by her own ignorance, and she began to think. Perhaps what old Mrs. Teruel had said to her about a child caused her chief uneasiness. Her mind was slow by nature, and her life had nourished her mind's torpor. But once the process of thought was started, it must continue and work to some end. Of course she did all in her power to hinder the process, as she was in the habit of calling herself morbid whenever she thought; but she was unable to get away from herself by stifling her thoughts, or by soaring away from the facts as Beverley did on the wings of imagination.

She wanted a child, and her instinct slowly informed her mind and unconsciously. Had any one noticed her change of mood and persisted in asking her its cause, she would have answered at last, "Oh, I'm a little morbid and a little out of sorts from want of exercise," and this was the

A Boy's Marriage 195

answer she gave to herself, excuse rather for her occasional depression. Only the germ of an idea was as yet formed within her.

That germ, however, developed, and developed steadily; until by imperceptible degrees she had decided that her ignorance was wrong. The seedling grew until she actually resolved to end that ignorance for ever by finding out the truth. But here she was confronted by an apparently insuperable difficulty—from what source to get the knowledge she wanted.

There were so many things which tied her tongue—and paramount among them was an innate feeling that such subjects were by their nature indelicate; and this was combined with shame at her own ignorance, and a fear that perhaps hers was not a nice mind to think of them at all.

She wished that there was some mysterious wise woman in the village, to whom she could go and put her question quite simply, and never speak to again; sometimes she thought of asking Beverley—very rarely and never for more than a moment. The idea made her shudder, and convinced her that she was thinking about something that no pure-minded girl should think of. Her thoughts would then fly off at a tangent to self-criticism, not very profound, and

196 A Boy's Marriage

to depression which a sunbeam was enough to lighten, but gradually they returned with ceaseless regularity to the subject of her ignorance. She had no control over her thoughts, nor initiative to enable her to make any forward move. She waited for guidance ; she was more ready to grasp any occasion of enlightenment. And that was something.

Growth of any kind is disturbing, even painful. Eva had no help from outside and she was barely conscious of her own desire. Everything in her was vague and unformed.

Meanwhile she made an effort to keep herself busy—with housework, embroidery, reading aloud. She went to the week-day service at the church, and even gave up the habit of lying down in the afternoon to doze over a book ; in fact she did her utmost to avoid thinking.

Marion was the first person to recognise some elements of what was occurring in her ; but with no friendly eye. Ever since the episode of Ajax's death she felt angry with Eva, and thought far worse of her than she deserved. Marion blamed her unjustly for Beverley's former distress ; and her stupidity with the poison destroyed the last remnant of her respect. She missed Beverley's intimacy and companionship, and felt more and more strongly how much more suited Eva was

A Boy's Marriage 197

to wool-work with her mother ; and feeling that, she realised how small a hold her home had over her : her dear old contented father would always be content—she knew that.

Beverley was writing, and Marion knew that he saw Mrs. Coltney Smith often, and was delighted that he did see her, or any one else who could rouse him. She was not jealous ; she was sad that she was no longer any good to him. She did not mope. She made the best of her time, and threw herself with more keenness than ever into the study of Italian, which she had recently begun to learn.

As the summer went on and the usual visitors came and went, the unrest little by little was felt by Mr. Teruel and even by his wife, who now and then made hints to Mr. Teruel—much to his annoyance—that all was not as it should be with Eva. To her he pooh-poohed them with amiable archness ; but they none the less disquieted him, and he could not close his eyes to some element of truth which they contained. He hated people to be unhappy, especially to be near him and unhappy.

He noticed how often Beverley went to the Dover, and at once was clear in his own mind about the state of things. Eva was jealous. Of course there was no harm in Beverley's visits.

198 A Boy's Marriage

He was too frank about them for that. But why need the young ass go at all ?

Once he broached the subject with precaution and asked Beverley how he thought his little wife was. Beverley, completely at his ease, said, "Splendid, dad, thanks ; I've taken your advice and it works finely." Mr. Teruel never felt so inclined to kick him as he did at that moment. He did not do so, however ; he only thought, "*Confound* the young fool," and began to talk about the garden.

As September passed away Beverley began to dread the day when the Dover would be shut up and his lady in London, and at length the bad day came when he took tea with her for the last time.

They were in the small room in which she worked. The week had been wet and cheerless, and Mrs. Coltney Smith was looking forward eagerly to London and a change of life. She told him so.

"You'll remember me sometimes, won't you ?" he said, pleading.

"Of course I shall," she said cheerfully, combating his despondence. "It's more probable that you will forget me with your work in that quiet little house, with that dear little wife, and your sister and your splendid dreams. I'm rest-

A Boy's Marriage 199

less, little friend, and I must wear myself out in society, seeing people and people and people. Oh, I know you disapprove, but, believe me, it's a necessity of my nature. I'm quite a different person to your Lady of the Woods. I feel the change coming over me now. For all you say, I expect your little wife will be glad to hear I've gone. I expect she dislikes me in her heart."

"Oh, how can you say such a thing?"

"After all, I'm more like an intelligent mother to you."

"Why will you say such horrible things? What does it matter what you are!" said Beverley, longing to be allowed to sit silently and stroke her hand.

"Well, dear, never mind. That's a glimpse of the London lady."

"Please don't laugh at me," Beverley said with difficulty, "but let me sit near you like this on a cushion by your feet ; and don't talk at all for a little while, let's dream of our moon evening."

"You dear boy——"

But her thoughts were far away ; she could not create a mood of emotion, as he could—and with all too fatal ease.

She kissed him when he went away, and stood

after he had gone wondering whether she had played straight with him, or had done him an injury.

"He has no place in life," she sighed to herself as she went upstairs to give her maid final instructions. "A beautiful creature, but what will happen to him?"

Soon after her departure Calderon arrived and his presence did not at all soothe Beverley. Calderon, for all his boisterous manner, was keenly observant, and quickly noticed that something was amiss. He sounded Mr. Teruel in his own way, fearing that his previous indiscretion might be the cause, in spite of the letter which had briefly told him that all was right.

"The youngster's worrying you," he said one evening, after rallying his old friend upon his unusual gloom.

"Nonsense, he's as right as rain," was the immediate answer, but Calderon worked round again to the subject and finally elicited the truth.

"I'm not sure that the young one's marriage is altogether a success."

"Ah! that's bad. Do you know at all what's wrong?"

"No I don't, that's the point; and how can I

find out? I don't understand the young beggar. What can I say? He's been running lately after an infernal woman who writes; and damn it, he seems quite fond of the girl. He can't be tired of her. And yet there's an intolerable feeling of discontent about—I don't know—perhaps I'm getting old. Why in heaven's name can't the young fool be happy? I suppose it was a mad idea wanting to keep him near me, trying to make him different from other young 'uns, keeping him at home. But it's always worked, Roger, it's always worked. And I couldn't have made a fuss with his mother about sending him off; it's not my nature. Besides, I wanted the young beggar near me."

"Yes, I understand, my dear old chap," said Calderon; he had not heard Teruel speak at such length and with such vehemence for a very long time.

"I understand; but surely we ought to be able to give him a hand between us, eh?"

"But how? I can't pry into his affairs. You dislike him; why, you're hardly civil to each other."

"Oh, I don't really; besides, damn it, likes and dislikes at my age—what's in that? You'll see I won't tease the kid any more. Don't you worry, we'll pull him through."

"Am I to blame? Hasn't he got a comfortable house, plenty of money, a pretty wife? If he's dull he can take it off travelling. I've done all I can for him, and I find that it has only brought me into an infernal position, and I can't stand it, I tell you, I can't stand it . . . and what can I do?"

"That's just what we'll find out," said Calderon.

The absolute conviction of his tone filled Mr. Teruel with confidence, and hands were solemnly shaken.

But Calderon did not find it easy to cope with Beverley's entire preoccupation, for he was engrossed in a long fairy tale which he was writing to divert his mind, and did not even notice Calderon's new manner to him. Calderon saw this and determined to make Eva talk to him; meanwhile he assured Teruel that Beverley at any rate was sound, if somewhat callous.

"Do you understand the kid at all?" asked old Tereul.

"Oh, he's only thinking about some blasted thing. He's sensitive—a neurotic—a very little is enough to put him off his perch and set him thinking, and he's not meant to think; means misery, thinking does—to a chap like him."

A Boy's Marriage 203

Then Calderon, more baffled than he owned by Beverley, began to approach Eva, taking every opportunity to talk with her alone. She was the type of girl he admired—pretty, healthy, without ideas ; and his sympathy went out to her when he discovered that she felt neglected. Quite naturally too, when he knew how Beverley had been running after another woman. She did not blame him, and her words said how happy she was ; but behind her words there was something which pointed—and which she meant to point—to her patience under ill-usage.

“A dear, sweet girl,” thought Calderon ; “I believe it would be policy as well as devilish agreeable to speak straight out to the young fool—let him have it, fairly and squarely.”

And upon this resolve, liker perhaps to a persistent whim, he acted as soon as opportunity and his own mood combined to allow him.

He began with a hearty good nature on the lines of being his father's oldest friend—that alone seemed to presage an impertinence.

Then he took Beverley's arm (he had come upon him in the garden between tea and dinner) and said—

“We don't quite hit it off together—you and I—do we now? Come to think of it, that's rather a pity, don't you think so?”

204 A Boy's Marriage

"Well, we haven't much in common, you see."

He smiled at his own use of his lady's little tag, and his thoughts sped away from his large companion.

"No, that's true enough. Now I've travelled a fairish bit and seen a good many men of one sort and another, and I know——"

"Yes, you've been all over India, haven't you?"

"Some of China and most of Europe——"

"Oh, I didn't know that."

"Ah, didn't you?" (the hold on his arm tightened into a grip) "and I have seen a good many different ways a man can succeed in messing his life, but none so sure as the way you've struck. You're a sensitive, neurotic——"

"That's a good word," said Beverley, tingling.

"And a damnable complaint; that's not your fault, however. But what is your fault is the way you are treating yourself. You're a moral consumptive living in a stuffy room: playing with emotional fancies while all the grit in you is going. You're miserable, and you're making your wife miserable and everyone else uneasy. You think I'm an imbecile, but . . . but I've eyes in my head. And this other woman. You

run after her—oh, purely, I know that, that's the devil of it—that's your sort—a kind of hankering after what you call the ideal—is it? or beauty? It doesn't much matter which. Vampires—worse than those who suck the blood, you instil the poison of your rotten ideas; anything to keep you from facing the facts of your life—what have you to offer? Sympathy—bah! And you're so infernally pleased with yourself—but that's only annoying; you're not a fool by any means; damn sight better for you if you were—and you can take it from me that my opinion is worth something——”

“I'm sorry that I should irritate you.”

“Now don't for God's sake be sulky about it, like a silly schoolgirl.”

“What would be the point of saying that I think you an impertinent old fool?”

“Why it'd get it off your chest, man!”

“Would it?”

“It's that infernal Oxford conceit, that'll do for you. You shelter behind it. Superior—well, God help you.”

And he turned abruptly and went off humming a music-hall tune and thinking that he had at least roused the young prig.

“Coarse beast,” thought Beverley, and tried to put his words out of his mind by sneering at

206 A Boy's Marriage

them. "What can he know about me, blast him?"

For a time he was successful in his attempt ; but only for a time. They were burned into his memory, and he could not rid himself of their torture. He was forced to search into his motives and ideals, and he found nothing with which to oppose this brutal view of him. For all his ideals floated vaguely in his mind like beautiful phantoms, that when he saw he took delight in, but he could not hold and express them even to himself, except by the words—sympathy, beauty, love ; and these words seemed meaningless before Calderon's easily expressed contempt.

And there was truth, a hideous inversion of truth, in what he said.

Beverley could not sleep that night.

He lay awake, trying to recall his visions of beauty, that they might soothe him by their presence. They came and they mocked him.

Vampire, they seemed to cry, and the word maddened him.

His Lady of the Woods, after all, what was she, what did he mean to her ? He was merely her plaything in the country—did she ever think of him ? Was she miserable, as he was miserable now without her ? Of course not.

A Boy's Marriage 207

He would have her miserable . . . ah vampire !
"You are like some fairy creature," he heard her voice. It was a lie. He was a man ; like other men.

He half rose in the darkness.

But he wanted to be loved, and he sank back in dismay.

Why was it he should bring a taint of misery into the peace of the family ? No one cared about his wretchedness ; why should they ? He was alone.

He stared into the darkness until he felt it closing in upon him and he was frightened. He lighted the candle and began to read, but he could not keep his thoughts from returning to that bad topic. He got out of bed and walked to the window, and putting aside the blind he saw the moon was shining ; and he looked out until once again he was sitting in the hollow the sea had made by the largest groin that wonderful evening, such a little while ago. The memory of that beauty was his possession—she too could not but remember—and grieve as he was grieving ? Vampire, came the sneer within him. He let the blind fall back, and he paced up and down the room, his soul crying out, "It's not true ; it's not true."

He did not know that he was fighting, as any

live creature struggles for its life, against the slow death of his environment.

He thought how gladly he would sink himself in anything to gain peace or even distraction from these ceaseless profitless self-searchings which led him in a circle stupidly no whither. Then quite suddenly an idea came to him and possessed his mind. He seemed to see himself as Calderon saw him, pining for a middle-aged woman beyond his reach—when only in the next room his wife was sleeping, a girl and beautiful, who belonged to him. Her white body enthralled his mind with its fair picture and sent the blood coursing hotly through his veins. How Calderon would mock at his ridiculous scruples, he thought; and what actually were his scruples? What were they? There lay release, for the moment at any rate, from himself in magnificent excitement; he would assert himself and enjoy the good things which were within his reach—his easy reach—and now, while he was master of those joy-stifling scruples. He opened his door and crossed the passage and carefully he turned the handle of Eva's door, and pushing it open without a sound, he stepped noiselessly into her room.

She was sleeping and did not stir. The room was not dark, for the blinds of the window

were pulled right up, and the light of the moonshine outside penetrated gently into the middle of the room, where the bed stood at right angles to the wall. On the sofa her clothes lay folded in two neat heaps, on each side of which a black stocking was hanging down, and the silver buckles of her shoes gleamed delicately, caught by a wandering ray. The bedclothes were in perfect order ; she must have slipped in between the sheets (purposely disarranging them as little as possible) and slept at once. They were not pulled up round her ; the bolster and pillow were a little lowered so that the sheet just touched her chin—exactly as it had been turned down by the maid.

All this Beverley saw with a slight surprise and a great fear.

The perfect order was like a guardian presence surrounding her, and the subtle fragrance that pervaded the room seemed to him the perceptible expression of this presence. It held him fascinated. He leaned against the open door which he was holding, trying to control his breathing. . . . A faint hope came to him that she might wake up and turn her head a little and see him standing there and smile and then take her arms gently from under the sheets and stretch them out to him ; then he would come

210 A Boy's Marriage

to her and hold her all sweet and fresh in his arms quite close to him, and the peace that was part of her room, that seemed to breathe from her—like her own breath, that came and went as gently as the sweetness of a spring flower in the early morning, before the sun has grown hot and the dew has gone—would become a part of him too, and he would no longer feel lonely. . . .

Such were the first thoughts ; they passed quickly through his mind.

But others followed. He saw the chasm that yawned between them, and the void in his own heart. That was all that might have been if she were other than she was, not in bodily sweetness, but in herself, if she understood. . . .

And Calderon's mocking words sounded again : Vampire . . . and again they maddened him and distorted his power of vision.

Calderon would say he was afraid, a sensitive neurotic, if he were to see him now, standing on the threshold of his wife's room. A ridiculous, ignorant fool. What had brought him there ? Lust, of course, mocked the voice of Calderon. Any woman is all you want, and what you're afraid to get. . . .

And he felt a foul intruder. Eva lay there

A Boy's Marriage 211

defenceless ; he was forcing himself upon some one who did not want him.

What devil in him had tricked him to this position ? What had awakened the illusion that she was near to him in any way ?

A sparrow outside had begun to chirp sleepily, as though half conscious that the morning was soon to dawn. Eva moved in her sleep and sighed.

He slunk away ; and lying in his own bed, he listened in a waking torpor to the chirping of the sparrows, which was fitful at first, but gradually swelled to a chorus of twittering, busy life.

Then he fell asleep.

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All next day he was obsessed by the longing to see his Lady of the Woods and to talk with her fully about himself. He wanted to ask her if he were indeed a vampire, as Calderon said. He recalled all her protestations of how much she cared for him, how she feared she might be a cause of sorrow to him, and he hated the thought that now she was bringing him distress. He convinced himself that it was only the coarseness and brutality of Calderon that caused his grief. But he could not go on living without an immediate sight of her—he must hear her voice

again and touch her hand, be once more in the presence which always brought him peace and strength.

He decided to go to London by the 9.16 in the morning. His decision came to him so much like an inspiration that he did not imagine that he might not see her. Perhaps even she was thinking of him and her thoughts were leading him to her as they had led him down to the beach on that wonderful evening of the moon. He felt her breath cool against his cheek ; he felt the sweetness of her actual presence. The idea that she might not want to see him became an impiety.

He told the family that he was going to see a man who (Bruce told him) was sailing for India in a few days. He might stay one night, or perhaps two, or he might come back the same day. His plans developed as he spoke.

"But where will you stop? How will you——"

"Oh, at the Cecil probably—I'll wire. Anyhow, don't send on any letters."

Calderon caught old Teruel's eye, lifted in amazement.

"We'll go up together some time, Eva, and we'll go to some theatres, and you can shop. Just ask Jane to pack things for the night."

A Boy's Marriage 213

"He can't stand me," chuckled Calderon amiably when he was alone with Mr. Teruel.

"Quite a good thing, this little jaunt."

"Probably he's only after that woman."

"Oh no, not at all, not at all. That's nothing ; it's only because she was near."

Beverley managed to conceal his immense excitement. As the trap drove to the station, through his head and heart beat the wild music of the thought that every turn of the wheels was bringing him further on the way to his lady. The excitement of that thought took possession of him and completely obscured the misery of the previous days and the reason of his visit.

When the train was well out of the station he flung aside his paper and, waving his arms in time, he sang the great Tannhäuser March at the top of his voice, over and over again.

The fields and hedges glistened and sparkled as the morning sun shone on the year's first touch of frost.

After he became more accustomed to the train's glad speed, that swept him nearer and nearer, he sat down in a corner, and the noise of the train's rush seemed the answering sound to the tumultuous joy of expectation. For a moment the doubt arose whether he would see her, and even a doubt of her great pleasure

when she did ; but doubts only acted as a relish to his conquering joy, they only became trivial points of resistance, and disappeared as children's sand dams fall toppling before the rising tide. Doubts—he laughed at them.

Joy painted in joy's own colours the meeting, and he tried to imagine the charm of her surroundings, which would in their own way convey something of the charm of her personality. Distinction he would see everywhere ; but would he be able to discover signs of her gentleness, of her true self ? Intuition would be his sure guide. “ Ah, little friend, this is delightful.” And she would give him tea, perhaps putting off one or two of her absurd society parties, saying she was not at home to any one. They would have a long talk ; and all his difficulties would cease to exist, and he would tell her that they were gone, and she would say how glad she was, and perhaps confess to him that it was good for her and refreshing as a breath of sea air to see some one who did not belong to the hard London world, and especially to see her unreal fairy creature.

Laugh they might too at the impulse, inspiration which had brought him hurrying to her, and which had caused such a heavenly party ; and he would force her to own how their love,

so far from being an illusion (detestable word), was much the most real thing in her life, even as it was the most valuable in his, because their love was based upon what was the highest in their natures.

That was the truth. Calderon's foul mind could pollute what was fair and rouse hideous phantoms, but these phantoms were lies and unreal.

"Evil minds turn good to their own nature." Shelley was always right.

Of course he could explain nothing to Calderon; no one could convince a colour-blind man of the beauty of a sunset. And he fell to wondering how he could have been much influenced by his narrow beastliness; but not for long, his thoughts were attuned by expectation to gladness.

An old man had entered the carriage at an intermediate station. The old man had a white beard and kept angrily glancing on one side of his paper at Beverley, who hardly realised his presence, until the old gentleman laid his paper across his knees and said fiercely—

"You seem infernally pleased with something, young man. I hate going to London. Filthy, black, pestilent place."

Beverley started and stared and laughed.

"Oh, business, I suppose?"

"What else should bring me; and on such a day? Not like you, some girl—I know—some girl—confess (he leant forward triumphant at his perception)—confess I am right."

Beverley laughed again: "Fairly right."

"Pooh! fairly right." He snorted and returned after the attack to his paper.

The idea of his lady being called—even ignorantly—"some girl," struck Beverley as delightfully humorous; his peerless, splendid lady—some girl!

He almost laughed aloud.

The old gentleman glared at him. "That all passes," he muttered.

Beverley decided exactly upon his movements.

It would be absurd to rush straight to his lady; he would spin out his joy of looking forward to their meeting. The idea of not trusting entirely to the glad providence that was leading him, of making a prosaic plan by telephone, seemed preposterous, even wicked.

He drove straight to the Cecil, half wondering at his own self-possession as he engaged a room and made inquiries about lunch. Then he went into the Strand and bought some cigarettes and wandered along the Embankment.

He could not eat anything at lunch, but

finished his half-bottle of claret and drank two cups of coffee. He still had more than half an hour before he would start, for he had decided not to get a cab until three. During that half-hour his excitement became a pain, and no delight ; he even wished that he had driven directly from the station to her house in South Audley Street. The slowly dragging minutes were intolerable to him. He gazed wearily at the second hand of his watch as it ticked busily round ; he heard it still ticking when he put it back in his pocket. He looked at the clock in the room. It was five minutes faster than his watch. He called a waiter at once and asked him the exact time. The waiter enraged him by looking up at the large clock and saying quite courteously, "A quarter to three, sir," as he took away the empty coffee-cup.

For a moment he thought that after all it would be wiser to go back again. He felt timid and very tired . . . then back upon him came sweeping, like a sudden gust of wind, his great excitement.

He must wash and have his boots polished ; he would hardly be ready in time. The waiter smiled at the tip he received from Beverley as he started up and hurried from the room.

He took a hansom and was obliged to tell

the driver the number of the house twice, and even then the man lifted the trap-door and almost maliciously, it seemed to Beverley, repeated it for corroboration.

In a dazed way he watched the traffic and looked up at the names of the streets into which they turned. He was vague about the exact distance, and when he saw his street's actual name, the shock was so great that he wanted to stop the cab and collect his thoughts a little by walking, but the driver pulled up immediately, and peering through the top, said, "This is the number, I think, sir."

Beverley got out, and having paid the driver he stopped to turn down his trousers, hoping that the cabman would go away. But the cabman was in no hurry; on the contrary, he took off his gloves and began to fumble for a pipe, smiling. So Beverley walked to the door and rang the bell. The strangeness did not pass away, but fought on equal terms with the excitement at being on the doorstep of her house.

A man-servant opened the door—unexpectedly soon.

"Can I see Mrs. Coltney Smith?" said Beverley, trying to control his voice.

The man-servant heightened his embarrassment.

"This way, sir, please ; one moment ; what name shall I say ?"

"Oh, Bever—er—Mr. Teruel."

He was left in the hall, which seemed to him more like a room with deep chairs and small tables and no comfort. But he was in her house ; as he noticed everything round him he wondered if she would hurry out at once to give him welcome ; he swiftly imagined her coming down the stairs with both hands stretched out—not coming quickly, she never moved quickly.

The butler came softly for so large a man down the stairs.

"Will you come this way, sir ?"

Beverley was disappointed, and hesitated for a moment as to whether he ought to take off his overcoat and to leave his stick. He did neither, and followed the butler into a room, the drawing-room.

"Mrs. Coltney Smith will be here in a minute or two, sir."

A wood fire was burning brightly and had a cheering effect on Beverley ; otherwise the room seemed to him more elegant than comfortable, arranged primarily for receiving many acquaintances, not for talking with a friend. He waited breathless for her coming.

220 A Boy's Marriage

He heard steps and a voice. The steps passed by and the voice he did not recognise.

What if some woman were staying in the house, he thought with sudden dread, and were to sit with them. Or she might be expecting some other visitor, some one he had never seen might be shown into the room.

Oh, why was she such a long time !

Again he heard footsteps—a touch on the door-handle—surely a voice which he recognised said something, he did not catch the words ; a door was opened and shut.

Then there was silence in the house, and outside the rumble of the traffic and the usual noise of a London street. He started as the clock chimed a quarter to four.

What could be keeping her so long ?

At last the door was opened and closed, and from behind the screen which hid the door from his view she came in. She wore a great hat daringly tilted, a muff on one arm, hands gloved in white, and face veiled.

“Ah, I thought it must be you, though Charles stupidly bungled your name. How well you look ; and what has brought you up into this hurly-burly ? Do sit down, and we must arrange when I can see you quietly for an hour. You must really spare me the time.”

A Boy's Marriage 221

Beverley gripped his hat to hide the shaking of his hands. He held the inside of his lip tightly between his teeth to keep back his tears.

He had nothing to say. He could not trust his voice.

He made a supreme effort at self-control and cheerfulness.

"What a delightful room this is ; it exactly suits you ; any one else would look insignificant in such a setting."

He was hoping that she would make some sign of affection ; and when she put her muff on a chair he thought she was really about to take off her gloves. But she did not, nor did she remove her veil.

"I'm glad you like my little home. But tell me what brings you to town, and how are your people ? And——"

"Oh, don't treat me as a casual caller."

"What do you mean, dear ?"

"If you knew how wonderful it was to hear you call me 'dear,' even in your cold voice. And you haven't even said that you're pleased to see me."

"Of course I'm pleased, but I'm very busy. Life here is more of a rush than ever." Her tone was not convincing.

"And you see I'm obliged to go out——"

"Oh, put off going out. It's you I've come to see in London—only you. If you knew the fearful joy that came to me directly I decided to come; how at the thought of speaking with you all my misery went; the drive—all the way in the train—each moment bringing me nearer to you; that terrible long lunch, and the long wait, and the drive in the cab, and you—you—you—were all that I thought of; and at last you came in here, and . . . you *are* pleased to see me—tell me you're pleased to see me—though you must go out. Oh, couldn't you put off your engagement?—don't go—say you're ill."

"My dear boy, you must not talk like this—be sensible, and tell me how long——"

"I thought you would be pleased that you were the one person to whom I must come in my despair. You know that you could help me and give me strength by—by just one touch of your hand. Couldn't you be gentle to me? Your love is the one thing that makes my life bearable. Be gentle to me."

She rose and swept up and down the room.

"How can you talk like this? Love—love—it comes glibly enough to your lips. But if you had the least consideration for my feelings you would not have broken in upon me in this

manner. Any surprise is a shock and upsets me. Of course I'm glad to see you. But I've nothing to say to you. Nothing whatever. You don't enter into my life, I tell you now as I've often told you before, and it sickens me to think that you sit at home and do nothing but brood over a woman—any woman, and especially when that woman is myself. Fight the good fight of life, and love will take care of itself."

"Oh, don't say these hard things, dear ; just come and—and stroke away my headache, and all the pain will go from my heart too. Couldn't you do that ? It's not much I ask."

"Be a man ! All these miserable little displays of affection simply disgust me—as though they had any sort or kind of connection with love. . . . I am living my own life."

"Don't, don't. I'll not disturb you any more."

"Can't you understand that I was not myself in the country ? You met me under exceptional circumstances. Nothing but your desire to know the truth would give me courage to say this. There are moments when you see things as they are, without the cloud of sentiment—things as they are (she beat out the words on the mantelpiece)—and I ought never to have encouraged you—that fatal *clair de lune*——"

"You can't spoil the beauty of what is passed."

"Only the coward shrinks from looking life in the face steadily. I have long given up that folly. I am made for unhappiness, because I cannot blind myself to the truth. I wish I could, but I have not the capacity for self-deception. No doubt you think I am brutal. Well, I am like that. It would have been much better if I had been able to deceive you. I haven't the gift. I have been fatally honest with you. And this is the result. Why did you come? Why ever did you come? I detest scenes of any kind. I shall be fit for nothing for days."

She did not see a boy broken by grief who loved her. She saw a man who stirred feelings in her which experience had taught her to shun; and in lashing him with her tongue's brutalities she only submitted him to what she had forced herself to submit. Weakness infuriated her, his sudden coming enraged her; and her fury and rage were carried beyond her power of control by the exasperation of recognising a certain responsibility which at the same moment she felt and passionately disowned.

"I'm sorry I came. I——"

"I assure you that no one could regret your coming more profoundly than I do. I am very

sorry to have hurt your feelings. Anyhow, you can have no illusions about me now."

"Oh, good-bye, good-bye," said Beverley ;
"forgive me for troubling you."

He ran downstairs and out of the front door without waiting for the staid butler, who made his appearance as the door banged to.

XIV

AND that was at an end. Nothing was left him of his friendship but the memory of what was past and the pain of thinking what might have been. He was humiliated; but the humiliation did not hurt him at all compared with the anguish of the question how she could have treated him in that way; he saw that he had never known her at all. Not even the memory of his joy remained. All was false between them—false. There could be no weakness in caring as much as he cared. Surely she might have understood. He asked for so little.

She must understand quite soon and write to him to tell him to come to her again; he made her angry just because she really had affection for him, and could not bear the call upon her inability to give expression to her affection suddenly.

And then he remembered that he had left no address.

He went into the first stationer's and bought a

packet of envelopes. He borrowed a pencil with which to write his message on the back of a card and to address one envelope ; the rest were crumpled into his coat pocket.

He hurriedly retraced his footsteps—almost elated, but as he turned into South Audley Street the fear struck him that he might meet her on the doorstep. He could not speak to her—not yet—not now. A telegram—ah ! that would precisely settle his difficulty.

He went back, walking quickly in the direction of the park ; there were shops to the right of St. George's Hospital he knew—sure to be a post office—walking would clear his brain. “Must see you, staying Cecil, please wire when.” No, that was too peremptory. “Should like to see you, please” ; he repeated the words to himself, and little by little he began to walk less quickly. She did not want to see him ; what was the use of wiring, and waiting through the long hours of a sleepless night for a letter which might only crush him with refusal ; and if he went again, how could he know that she would treat him at all differently.

“No one could regret your coming more profoundly than I do.” Those were almost her last words—relentless—irrevocable.

And yet it could not be that he meant nothing

to her, that so much beauty was quite without meaning.

His head throbbed ; he pushed his hat back, walking very slowly—aimlessly. Men passed him and stared at him with a cold indifference. He read into their glances studied contempt and cowered before it. They all despised him as Calderon despised him. And all the men with whom he had been so happy at College, which of them could understand his plight? Everything was easy for them ; they had so little feeling. "Girlie" they used to call him, laughing at him of course. Some of them he had actually pitied—he the pitiable creature, who whined after women and was not wanted. Why indeed should he be wanted? A plaything to them. Love—who could want his love?

He stopped without knowing why before the shop, brightly lighted, of an expensive cigarette-maker, having turned to the left down Piccadilly in the direction of his hotel.

"Hullo, dear ; good evening," he heard a voice a little above a whisper, and looking round he saw a smartly dressed woman smiling at him with sparkling eyes. She was moving slowly past him looking over her shoulder, but she came up to him, when he, partly by in-

stinct, partly out of astonishment, took a step forward.

"In the dumps, eh?"

"How do you know?" asked Beverley, blushing.

"Oh, I watched you wandering along, like a—like a—forsaken mermaid."

The literary shot told. She had known a man of letters once. She came a little nearer to Beverley and said quickly—

"We mustn't talk here. Come and have a cosy, jolly tea in my little flat. I'll soon cheer you up"; and without waiting for an answer she held up her umbrella to a cab that was crawling by. And Beverley followed her in.

"Yes, tea will be splendid," he said, laying a special emphasis on the word tea.

She laughed and patted his knee reassuringly. Then she deftly opened the lamp that was lighted in the cab and blew it out, nodding—"That's for your sake."

"Oh, I've such a comfy little place right at the top of the mansion, all to myself, and I've a piano; you shall see. Dumps, what nonsense! What's the use of worrying? It makes nothing better. I know girls who get so miserable that they drink to forget. I never drink or anything of that kind; it's fatal, except to be jolly; that's

different. Oh, you'll soon forget your troubles. My name's Cynthia ; distinguished kind of a name, isn't it ? You read lots of books ; I can see that in your clever face, so I shall call you Endymion. Isn't it fun meeting new people, when they're not stand-offish. Fun—oh—why we're almost there ; you need only give Mr. Cabby one-and-six. The kettle will boil in a jiffy, and all your woes will evaporate like steam out of the kettle's spout. Quite a poet myself, eh ? ”

She talked and laughed without ceasing, and while Beverley listened astonished, something whispered within him “ This is life.” And he listened to and watched her, feeling quite aloof from all the life which she represented, sadly interested and somewhat distracted from himself.

He wondered too how any one could deceive himself for a moment into imagining himself fond of a person like this, or attracted by her in any way. However, there was an element of adventure, even daring, in this visit to her flat. Cynthia—he smiled.

It was refreshing to talk to a stranger who knew absolutely nothing about him or his life. She amused him too ; and there was a novelty about the whole thing.

A Boy's Marriage 231

The cab stopped opposite a block of flats by Shaftesbury Avenue.

Half-way up the flight of stone steps she stopped, and shaking her umbrella at him—her umbrella was very neatly folded—said—

“No glum face may come into my flat, mind.”

She prodded him deftly, and he could not help laughing, in spite of himself.

“That’s right ; Excelsior, as the pilgrim said ; it was the pilgrim, wasn’t it ? And the question is, have I forgotten my latchkey ? No, and here we are at last.”

“Look here ! If you don’t mind—I really think—I won’t——”

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense, you needn’t be afraid, I won’t bite you. Of course I should mind very much. There, isn’t it snug ?”

She coaxed him in, switched on the light, and Beverley saw a passage which ended in a kitchen. On one side of the passage was the wall, on the other side doors opened.

“Look, this is my sitting-room, that’s my bedroom, that’s my bathroom, and that’s my kitchen. Take your coat off ; look, you can hang it on that peg. The servant’s out, so we must make tea together. Oh, there’s such a nice fire here, I’ll fetch in the kettle and

another cup ; make a place for the kettle on the fire."

He set the fire into a red blaze, and then observed the scrupulous neatness of the room ; the walls were plain bright red, and covered with framed prints from Christmas numbers and one immense, unframed oil-painting of a battle ; the chairs were upholstered in faded pink ; photos and little vases crowded the mantelpiece.

A curious homely feeling took away Beverley's shyness, and the novelty of the experience made him forget why he was feeling so very tired.

"Good boy," she said, as she came hurrying back and put the kettle on the fire.

"It's jolly, isn't it?" she said, with real eagerness ; then taking his arm, "Come and talk to me while I take off these horrible stiff things."

She was clever enough not to take the least notice of Beverley, as she removed her hat and coat and skirt, and stays ; she did not take off her walking shoes.

"This is a jolly room too," he said, trying to appear entirely at his ease, and very much afraid that he might appear a fool in her eyes. But she knew her man by this time.

She took a red tea-gown out of the settee at the end of the bed.

"You must do this up for me at the back. No,

A Boy's Marriage 233

don't get up," she said, and sat down upon his knee.

His hand shook as he fitted the hooks into the eyes.

"It's done now," he said, touching her hair above her neck (her hair was strongly scented) with his lips.

She gave a little shiver. "You mustn't be a bad boy," she said, and leaning back she put one arm round his neck and kissed him on his lips; he had never been kissed like that before. Then she got up.

"Heigho, heigho," she closed her eyes, sighing, and stretched herself like a sleepy cat.

"Come along, come along," she said quickly, shaking her finger at him. "The kettle's boiling."

Beverley half recognised that he was being consoled, and he resisted the cheapening of his grief with a fierce moroseness. What was the true value of things? He could not pretend that he felt dislike of this fantastic creature's kiss. Why was it that the woman whom he adored should sink him from the very elation of joy into abject misery, and this Cynthia should be able to chatter away his sorrow?

"What! Glum again? Have you lost all your money? . . . Sugar?"

234 A Boy's Marriage

"Please. . . . No, I've plenty of money."

"What is it? Tell me. I can see that you're simply at the end of your tether."

"Of course I am, or I shouldn't be here."

Beverley was staring into the fire. At length he realised the silence, and turned his head feeling very uneasy at what he had blurted out.

"Have some bread and——" She swallowed something. Her feelings were no less really hurt because she saw what a hold was given her thereby over the boy.

"Forgive me," he stammered, "I didn't mean to say that; I'm a brute."

"Oh, I'm—quite used to being insulted," she said, with a little catch in her voice.

"Don't mind—don't mind what I say, you wouldn't if you knew what an unutterable beast I am. And far worse than—don't let me make you miserable."

She took no heed. He got up and went on excitedly—

"I bring misery wherever I go. I don't know why it is—I seem always acting a part which isn't the one I want—Cynthia, little lady of the moon—Oh God!" he cried out in desperation, as the memory of his wonderful evening, recalled by the words, flashed before him: he saw it all with torturing distinctness, saw the hollow in the

beach by the groin, the shimmer of the moonlight on the sea, heard the soft ripple of the waves. . . .

His breath came and went in deep sobs, but no tears were in his eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha," he burst out laughing. "Make me forget, forget——"

She ran to him alarmed. He flung his arms round her.

"——forget on the mad sweetness of your lips."

That she understood. She did not allow the flame of his passion to flare out.

She led him to an arm-chair, and sitting on his knee with one hand on either shoulder, she leaned over and slowly kissed him as though her lips were drawn to his.

Suddenly she laughed, and swiftly taking out the comb and pins she shook her hair free, and as she leaned over him it covered his face.

Then she took his sovereign purse from his pocket, and, pinching his ear with her polished nails, said, "Blow"; and the purse opened; and as she kissed him again she felt with her fingers that the purse was nearly full.

Beverley would not have noticed if she had taken everything—watch and purse and chain. But she looked further ahead and counted on a safer and a better prize.

She knew that he was the kind to trust for immediate money ; she even hoped (quite sincerely) that they might become what she called "real friends." She was a clever woman of business, and intended to retire into respectability as soon as she could afford it : her ideal was to buy a small inn somewhere in the country.

Beverley gazed at her fascinated ; a mist hovered in front of his eyes, which were burning.

"Don't go," he murmured, as she left his knee, half fearful lest his consciousness should return.

Quickly she opened a cupboard and took out a bright green bottle of Crème de Menthe and a wineglass, which she filled nearly full.

"Come," she cried, "come and drink in green joy. 'To hell with stupid sorrow.'"

He sprang to his feet and drank.

"Ha, ha, that's good stuff."

"Me too," she pouted, holding out her hand for the glass. He gave it to her. She filled it again and sipped—and handed it to him. While he drank she stepped back from him and hands clasped behind her back, she put her head up, stooping a little, her lips pursed, her eyes twinkling. . . . He leaned forward to kiss her, but

she retreated and retreated, until at last he caught her in his arms.

She broke away from him ; and her whole manner changed entirely, to his complete bewilderment, as she twisted up her hair and said—

“Well, I suppose you'd better go now for dinner.”

“Oh no, no ; can't we dine together ?”

She looked dubious.

“Yes, do let's dine together somewhere,” he persisted.

She smoothed her dress and said nothing. He continued to urge her.

Then quite suddenly she danced up to him, and taking both his hands, cried out—

“Hurrah ! Splendid, splendid ! We'll dine—phiz ? (she put her head on one side inquiringly) —we'll dine and go to a jolly little place I know—and then—oh, I forgot, of course not” . . . and she sighed.

They were to dine at a small restaurant in Soho ; she would not let him go back to the hotel to dress. He suggested it to assure her of his respect.

“No, it's not worth the trouble ; you may sit and smoke a cigarette while I get ready. You like me just—a very little bit ? Will you get

238 A Boy's Marriage

glum if I leave you here? You mustn't, you know, or you'll spoil our evening. Just look how untidy I am!"

"Don't be long," said Beverley.

He closed his eyes, but that seemed to shut his thoughts down upon himself. They went back to unpleasant incidents which he wanted to forget.

He rose and lighted a cigarette.

She was singing again in the next room.

He went to her door and tapped.

"Come in, come in."

She was brushing her hair in front of the glass.

"I hate being by myself; do let me sit in here."

"Of course you may."

She went on brushing her hair—in silence.

Then she knelt by his chair and taking his hand put it against her cheek, saying softly—

"I'm much too fond of you; you're so gentle and considerate. But you're still sad. Perhaps after all you don't really want to dine with me. You despise me; then why did you come?"

"I don't despise you."

"Oh well," she said, getting up, "I can cheer you up a bit; I have, haven't I?"

A Boy's Marriage 239

"Yes, I should think you have. I can't understand why you're so jolly to me."

"It may be because I'm a jolly person, who knows? I'll tell you a secret. (She leaned forward, laughingly mysterious.) Fate began by playing me some dirty tricks; but Fate saw they took no effect and changed tactics, because I was born happy."

"I believe you must have been."

"I must hurry up. That's it, I swim through life like a duck in a pond; and troubles, ha, ha—water off the duckie's back."

"I'm a chicken," said Beverley gloomily. She clapped her hands.

"Do you like the way I've done my hair? Do say you're pleased." She stamped her foot petulantly.

She finished dressing quickly, talking all the while, half bantering, half serious.

Just as they were going out she said—

"You're not at all nice to me, not a little bit, are you? I believe if I were to sit on the floor and weep out all my troubles you'd be ever so much nicer. Stupid, stupid, stupid boy," and she kissed him each time she said "stupid."

"Key? yes. Handkerchief? yes. Money? . . . (she laughed, looking at him) Money?"

240 A Boy's Marriage

"Yes," said Beverley.

The lady who said that she was born happy was able to make the dinner a success without drawing too largely upon his purse ; she even restrained him from throwing his money away on fruit that was out of season and dishes that were never in. Almost to his annoyance—because it was new to him to be spending money in a place where his money lent him importance and brought him respect. He noticed too with pleasure that no prettier woman was dining in the restaurant. Many men eyed her with obvious admiration ; that tinged his pleasure with anger.

"Let's go to a music-hall," he said as he sipped his coffee, with breath slightly bated at his own suggestion.

"Oh no, they're so dull. We'll go to a little bar quite near, much more amusing, and not so long and crowded."

"Anywhere you like ; but I don't want to be back early. When shall we go ?"

"Oh now ; call the waiter and pay."

The proprietor and head waiter bowed low to them as they went out.

"We'll walk," she said, "it's only a step."

He was delighted when she took his arm as they crossed the street. It roused his protective

instinct ; more perhaps as in reality she so little needed any protection.

"There may be some girls there—gay—just be friendly, and stand them a drink. Then it'll be fun for you perhaps. You don't mind my saying this?"

"Not a bit. You know I'm—er—strange—to——"

"Yes—and here we are."

She turned into a doorway and ran down carpeted stairs to swing doors which she pushed open. Beverley followed rather nervously.

He found himself in quite a small room, with large wine-barrels standing round the walls on one side, and on the other a bar, in front of which sat two young men on high stools laughing with the barmaid. By the barrels sat three women smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. A small boy dressed as a waiter sat on the bar, whistling. As they came in the barmaid pushed him off, saying, "Play us a tune, Adolphus."

"I won't kiss you to-night," he said, with perfect self-possession, "giving me a sudden start like that. And what may I get you, sir?" he said to Beverley. "Shocking young person, that," he added—jerking his head back in the direction of the barmaid.

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242 A Boy's Marriage

"And how may you be this evening, my dear?" he spoke to Cynthia like a father.

"All the merrier for seeing you, imp," she laughed.

"What the girls would do without me! Ver-mouth—Italian or French?"

"Italian," answered Cynthia to Beverley's look of inquiry.

They sat near the three women, who nodded to Cynthia; and in a little time she introduced Beverley to them as "Mr. Wright." As soon as an opportunity offered (and one came very soon) he begged to be allowed to stand them a drink. They permitted him.

On his innocence the place—dirty and dull enough to an older man—produced a great effect. It suggested all that was most Bohemian and exciting; the two men, he thought, must certainly be writers or painters or artists of some kind. The splendid Mermaid Tavern was probably quite similar, where Marlowe and Peele and Nash and flaunting Greene drank and swore in those robustious times of Elizabeth. The women began to talk more freely, as he became less shy, and to tell stories, which he felt were quite in keeping with the place; he did not understand the points, but realised vaguely that they were improper.

A Boy's Marriage 243

The swing door was pushed violently open, and a girl entered with a curtsy and, "Hullo, here we all are, and all so quiet ; who's got a cigarette ?"

Every one brightened up and greeted her as "Kitty."

"How am I ? Oh I've been tight for three days now ; toothache—straight, no kidding—I can't stand that." She cake-walked slowly across the room with her whisky.

"Give us a dance, Kitty."

"Do, my own Kate," put in the small waiter.

"Dance, good God ! Me ?"

"She's in an awful way," whispered Cynthia to Beverley ; "her young fellow's in trouble."

"What ?" asked Beverley, mystified.

"Oh, in prison," she leaned nearer, "the young fool borrowed some money and was found out ; six months that means, and they've lived together for more than a year. Isn't it sad ?"

"Well, you're all asleep to-night. Cinnie, what's wrong ? Tune up the old concordium. Where's the manager ?"

"That's all right, he's just been down."

The musical-box began to play, and Kitty danced with much abandon, a dance of her own, something between a skirt-dance and a cake-walk and a reel.

"She's made money by that," whispered Cynthia.

Suddenly she stopped. "My jaw aches too frightfully," she said, sitting by Beverley.

"How sickening for you."

"I should think it — well was ; and look here, blessed if I haven't lost my garter."

"Shame—naughty girl," said the small waiter.

"Young monkey," she called out and gave chase, pulling his ears and kissing him, when she finally caught him, "young rip."

"My name is Adolphus, if you please."

"She's his sister," whispered Cynthia ; "really it's quite true," she added, seeing Beverley look incredulous. "Stupid girl to drink as she's been drinking ; can do her no good. Why doesn't she go to a dentist ?"

"What are you whispering about me ?"

"That you ought to go to a dentist, dear. Now why don't you ?"

"He'd do it for nothing," jeered the small waiter, pinching her.

"Whoever knew such an imp ?" she said, putting an arm round his neck. Adolphus struck an attitude which made Beverley laugh.

"Oh, don't encourage him. Now be a good boy and fetch two nice ham-sandwiches for me."

She came back to her seat by Beverley.

He felt very uncomfortable, as he had half a sovereign which he wanted to give her, and did not know how. At last he took her hand, and shutting the fingers on the coin, put the hand back on her knee, saying, "Forgive me, but do see the dentist to-morrow." She opened her hand, and seeing the half-sovereign quickly put it in her purse. "Oh I say—that is—thank you." She was quite upset by his kindness for a moment; then she embarrassed him by flinging both arms round his neck and kissing him heartily.

"My word, my word—to think that I should be fetching 'am-sandwiches for such an abandoned woman," said Adolphus, coming back.

"Stop your nonsense, now. He's a real good 'un, I tell you." She faced round; she was absolutely serious. "He's been and given me half a thick-'un to have me tooth out with, quietly as you please, and all for nothing."

Every one applauded. She beckoned Cynthia and whispered to her in a corner.

"Can the dear afford it?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You don't mind?"

"Not a bit."

"In luck then?"

"Rather."

246 A Boy's Marriage

"Well, you deserve it ; and he must be a nice, dear boy."

"You're right ; he is."

"Well, let's go now," said Cynthia, coming back to Beverley ; "I'm tired of this place, it's dreadfully doleful here to-night : we'll go to my little room and talk comfortably over a cosy fire, shall we ? Or must you get back ? Oh, and I'll sing to you."

"Oh no, not yet ; that's exactly what I should like."

Every one said good night. Kitty ran up to him and squeezed his hand ; she seemed a little inclined to weep, and Beverley, fearful of being thanked again publicly, said good night as firmly as he could and went away. He insisted on a cab.

His head ached a little, but he was excited by this glimpse of a new life, and also by the wine which he had taken.

"I feel you're like an old friend," she said softly in the cab, putting her arm in his confidently and pressing his arm against her. "You are a wee bit fond of me, aren't you ? I'm not just an interesting wicked woman. I really wanted to make you happier. I wish more men were like you."

She spoke sincerely, though she could not help

smiling at thoughts which her last words were swift to evoke.

"What are you thinking about so solemnly all to yourself?"

"Oh, just that curious little place; it was very interesting. I've never seen anything like it before. Have you ever heard of the Mermaid? Of course you haven't; it was the place—a tavern rather like that I should think—where all the great playwrights used to sit and drink. . . . Fine fellows!"

"With nice girls?"

"Yes, rather."

"Too proud and clever to kiss them, eh?"

"Oh, were they!" He laughed and kissed her hair.

"I don't call *that* a kiss, thank you. You've not kissed me at all; you've only allowed me to kiss you. I believe you've got a horrid mind. No, no," she edged away from him. "Here we are. And I think I'd better say good-bye here; and it'll be good-bye for always, because I know you won't ever want to see me again."

"Oh, do let me come in; really I want to. You promised. You know I like you fearfully. You know that you're much more than just any one to me now. Besides, you promised, and I want to hear you sing."

248 A Boy's Marriage

"Did I promise?"

He paid the cabman, and did not observe his sly look of knowledge.

"You see I don't feel strange now a bit," he said to her as they climbed the stairs. "Who's thinking now?" he added, as she remained silent. She did not speak until they were in the flat; then she sank into a chair.

"Look, the fire's out," she said dejectedly.

"Let me light it; I'm a dab at a fire; sticks in the kitchen, I saw where they're kept"; he was gone in a moment and back with firewood.

"See, and the back of this paper, no, a page of advertisements," he tore it out and crumpling it put it in the grate and laid the sticks on it: "now a few pieces of coal, and it'll soon burn splendidly. Where are the matches—matches?"

"I don't know; oh, you'd better go—you despise me—any fool could see that."

He knelt by her side. She didn't move, but lay back in her chair looking up at the ceiling, and paying no heed whatever to his protestations and entreaties.

"Don't talk like that. Why will you? It's quite untrue."

He got up and putting a hand on the arm of the chair he leaned over her and began to kiss her face (the wrist supporting him trembled),

her forehead, her eyes, her hair, her neck, and at last, almost against his will—her lips. She moved him with her hand on to her knee and put his arm round her neck.

Again their lips met.

"If you had no collar on, I could kiss your neck." She deftly unfastened his tie and he undid his collar, throwing it away. The idea charmed him.

"You're hurting me. Get up."

He stood up, holding his hand in front of his eyes and pressing his temples, which were throbbing.

"It was the buttons of your coat."

He threw off his coat—and was once more in her arms.

She began to whisper to him. "Why cramped in this chair—these hot clothes between—I'm stifling in them—all sweet—take me away—just to lie in your arms."

He tried to lift her out of the chair.

"No, no, I'm too heavy—see like this——"

Half carrying her he took her into the bedroom—at the door she turned her head and smiled. She was glad that he was hers—and glad too, as she switched out the electric light, that a fire had not been wasted. She had no need to sing to him ; her victory had been easier

250 A Boy's Marriage

than she expected, and was complete. He certainly was a very dear boy.

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When Beverley awoke in the morning, the first thing of which he was conscious was a smell of violets and a cool hand stroking his face gently. He opened his eyes and saw Cynthia smiling and looking fresh and delightful. He moved and felt ashamed.

"Sleepy darling ! look, I've brought you some tea and toast. I've been up ever so long and had my bath, all fresh for my new young lord and master. Come, just slip this on," and she helped him into a woolly bath robe exactly like the one which she was wearing.

She sat on the bed talking, and every now and then taking a bite of his toast.

"Is the tea nice ? When must you go ? Not at once ; I should hate you to hurry away, and you've never even said thank you, or good morning ; wherever are your manners, you bad boy?"

"Good morning," said Beverley.

"No ; be serious. When must you go ?"

"Oh, not yet. What's the time ?"

"Nearly a quarter to ten."

"There's a train about four, and I must go to the hotel. But don't talk about going. I don't

want to think. I don't want to think." His voice broke.

"Look, here's a cigarette. I've not forgotten anything, have I? I'll light it."

And she took away the tray.

"I did like to see you sleeping."

She lit a cigarette and handed it to him.

"Now I've something to say to you that I hate saying. I've looked after you nicely, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"And you know I must live." She hid her face. "And——Oh, I hate it so——"

"Stop; I know," said Beverley. "Of course, you must let me give you money." He went very red.

"But I've only a sovereign I can spare in cash, so I'll have to send you a cheque."

"A note 'd be better. You can cash a cheque at the hotel."

Beverley detested this talk about payment. He wanted to deceive himself to the end, and this came before him like a sordid fact. Any one who had money could get all this attention, he thought, and began to ask himself why he was there, to reproach himself; but suddenly she put her arms tightly round his neck—

"Don't think I only care for money, because I

252 A Boy's Marriage

must live—I am fond of you—I am fond of you—don't repulse me—I couldn't bear you to. Oh, you needn't give me any money; I don't want it—not from you. Take me in your arms again.”

As she spoke she took the cigarette from his fingers, and he heard it fizzle out in the teacup. Then he felt her body clinging against his.

“Forgive me—forgive me . . .” she was whispering.

XV

A VAGUE dread was growing within him concerning his return to the hotel, and that dread helped to rob his parting with Cynthia of any poignancy. He wondered how he could be leaving her with so little regret ; it was not wholly explained by her remark, "I'm always here." He was too inexperienced to understand why his going seemed to matter so little ; "I've gone through too much," he thought wearily and quite wrongly.

His mind was too subtle to grasp the obvious in a direct manner, his mind reached the obvious only after an immense detour, and accordingly saw it from a peculiar standpoint. He was amazingly deficient in common sense.

The porter, whom he particularly dreaded, did not appear at all surprised, only to his sensitive observation a little amused by his story—quite an unnecessary confidence—of having met a friend, at whose house he had spent the night. The man's indifference astonished him and seemed to infect him, for the dull burden of his

thoughts as he drove through the streets without any interest, and took tea in the buffet of the station, persisted that nothing after all really mattered very much. And as the train left Victoria, almost before it passed between the desolate long platforms of Grosvenor Road, gathering speed along the bridge's flatness, he fell asleep. He dozed through the noise of the train's stop at Clapham Junction. Idly lifting his eyelids once and closing them, he slept again, and the wind, as the train went on, blew through the open window coolly and freshly upon his face, and in his sleep he welcomed its freshness, for his sleep was a kind of torpor, which did not deprive him of all consciousness.

At last he awoke—shivering. Night was upon the country through which he was being carried, and the night was very dark. Red sparks from the engine flew by ; lights in farm-houses and village streets twinkled and glowed and disappeared.

He remembered the many previous journeys along the line which he knew so well. When he had come back from College after his first term, burning with keenness to be at home and tell them all about his experiences ; when for the first time he had brought old Bruce back—that was in the summer—and he had explained to

A Boy's Marriage 255

him, nervously enough, all about his family and the house in general, almost ashamed at the thought that a great man like Bruce was his friend and was going actually to stop a week with him. He remembered too the journey which had appeared to him so inexplicably long, because each moment of it seemed to be keeping him from Eva, who was waiting for him—not on the station platform—his home-coming then had always been a small event.

He shivered, pulled up the window with a jerk, and walked to and fro in the carriage. He felt very glad that no one would meet him. The short walk in the dark he wanted, and he wanted to be alone. He would dress at once, and meet Eva in the drawing-room.

He saw himself in the glass of the carriage. He looked carefully, anxious to find out if there were any signs in his face, signs which that porter had observed. He could distinguish no difference. But would Calderon? He hated the man's habit of prying and interference.

He sat down and shut his eyes. He smelled the strong scent of her hair, and felt the touch of her hand upon his forehead, and all the fascination of her woman's body. The hand did not feel cool, but cold with the chill of a toad, and her fascination was without charm. He

could not drive away the illusion of her presence. He sniffed at his clothes ; surely she must have sprinkled some of her filthy violet stuff upon them ! He lighted a cigarette and inhaled it deeply. But that too seemed tainted ; he tasted the smell with sickening distinctness in the tobacco, and spat in his disgust at it, as though he had bitten some nauseous leaf.

Only one day before he had sat in the train (perhaps the same train) singing, laughing aloud to himself like an idiot. Why had his lady repulsed him so cruelly and driven him into the streets ? If she had only been a little gentle—a very little gentle, and explained to him, and not thrown him down into such grief ! He was not consoled ; he could not be consoled. What could ever take the place of her beauty and her understanding ? . . . “ I am still your fairy creature,” he cried, and laughed mockingly at the sound of his voice, and leaning back in the corner of the carriage he tried to sleep. But he could not sleep. The woman's presence haunted his mind and prompted horrible comparisons between her and his Lady of the Woods. Ideas came into his head which filled him with shame and would not leave him. “ My mind is polluted as my body is polluted, and both are defiled for ever,” he thought ;

and the thought seemed to him irrevocably true, and he despaired.

The evil that had always lurked in him was now apparent. He knew now what his love of beauty meant: it was the merest mask of his corrupt self. He was evil, a hypocrite. Ah, that was clear enough now! No wonder that Eva, a pure girl, had shrunk from him—her instinct had warned her; no wonder a clever, beautiful lady saw through him at last, and sent him away; no wonder he was welcomed by a woman of the streets—he was her equal. Equal? No—far beneath her, far beneath her. She had the courage to appear what she was, while he masqueraded as a lover of beauty, as a refined person, with frightful hypocrisy—and now he was slinking back to his comfortable home.

Every one at home had a right to despise him now, and he hated them for possessing that right almost more than he hated himself.

The train after a long run from London began to stop at small stations, and he knew that he would soon arrive at Ford Junction, where he must change. Then six short minutes and he would be stealing back to the Lodge, through the village, by the church, to take up his old life once more, his old life under such terrible new conditions.

Again he felt thankful that he had sent no telegram and that no one would be there to meet him. He clung to the short respite of his walk. He would catch the connection easily enough, the porter told him, as he took his bag from the rack. He walked across the bridge to the proper platform, hoping that he would not meet farmers or acquaintances of any kind who knew his father from having met him casually at cattle shows. As he came down the steps from the bridge, a dog led by a boy nearly made him stumble by catching the chain round one of his legs. The boy held on tightly to the chain confused and apologising, trying to pull the dog back. To extricate himself Beverley was obliged to take the chain away from the boy, and as he did so, the dog, who was grey and shaggy, licked his hand with two sharp snaps of his tongue, exactly in the way that Ajax used to greet friendly strangers. Beverley did not fail to notice this, and it was the first time that he had touched a dog at all since the death of Ajax.

The memory of his loss unmanned him. Why should a piece of stupid carelessness have robbed him of such a friend? And on the opposite platform a dog, something like Ajax, was fawning on that ass of a boy. He saw him as his train went out of the station, and he could not keep himself

from leaning out of the window, until a curve in the line put even the station lamps out of sight.

It would have made all the difference to him to have had the silent, splendid welcome of Ajax. All his present misery seemed to have been caused by that horrible poison.

The brakes were put on, the train slowed down and stopped in the station.

"I was quite sure you'd be in this train, as you didn't wire. Fancy not wiring!"

He started to hear Eva's voice, and mechanically lowered his face for her kiss.

"Fancy that; how are you?" was all he found to say.

As they stood waiting for the train to go off that they might cross the line, she held his hand in hers, and took his arm as they crossed. She prattled on with hardly a second's interval, about her intuition of his coming, begging him to tell her all that he had done, and saying how pleased she was to see him again.

"And there's a letter for you, more than one; but one I know you'll like to have, because I know the writing: it's from Mrs. Coltney Smith. I do hope you saw her in London."

"Yes, just for a moment. When did the letter come?"

260 A Boy's Marriage

"First post this morning. You drive and I'll sit on the box seat beside you."

Then she must have sat down and written to him directly he had gone away. Oh, fool, fool that he was, not to have told her where he was staying! and now that was at an end. He almost hoped that the letter contained his final dismissal. He shrank from the idea that she wrote asking him to forgive her unkindness.

"Aren't you pleased I came?"

"Yes, of course I am."

And Eva—why was she behaving like this? What business had she to have intuitions about him? There seemed a conspiracy to heap shame upon his head, the shame of kindness which he did not deserve. He was on the point of asking her brutally—to silence her—"Why did you poison Ajax?" But the idea of such a question only made him more contemptible in his own eyes.

They arrived. In the hall Eva helped him off with his coat and taking both his hands said, "It's seven now. We're going to dine at eight; and all by our little selves." She held up her face for a kiss. He stooped and touched her forehead with his lips, saying, "Where are the letters?"

A Boy's Marriage 261

"Oh, how silly of me; here they are. Dearest, you *do* look tired."

"I'm not a bit tired, thank you."

He went into his room, and sat holding the letter in his hand, afraid to open it. And as he sat looking into the fire once more the odour of violets came upon him.

He tore open the envelope. The letter was quite short.

"Dear little Friend,

"You must try and forgive me for all the harsh words I said. I was upset by your sudden coming and I only realised how bad a friend I had been when you hurried away. As I don't know whether you are staying long in London, or where you are staying, I am writing to your home. My life is so busy and engaged that you *must* let me know when you are coming; I think I could always find an hour or so then for a rather special little friend, whom, believe me, I can ill afford to lose. Bear with me. Bless you.

"Yours always, ."

He looked through tears closely at the signature. Certainly the letters were L. W., which could only stand for Lady of the Woods. He

folded up the sheet and slipped it back into the envelope.

As he was putting the envelope into his breast pocket his hand touched another paper. That was odd ; he thought his pocket was empty. He kept his hand in the pocket, looking vacantly into the fire, stunned by the words which he had just read, wondering what the paper could be—thinking what a great pity it was that now he was polluted and unable any more to be her fairy creature. He pulled out the other paper ; it was a half-sheet, upon which was written, “My address is C. Bell,” the address followed in clear handwriting, and then, “I know you won’t forget me.”

He got up and went to the writing-table unsteadily. “You are mistaken in me, I am a foul ——” He drew his pen thickly through the last word ; then he tore up the paper into little bits. What good, he thought, was it to obtrude his beastliness on another ?

He held his head between his hands, both elbows far forward on the table. Something seemed to be pressing him down with sheer unyielding weight. He felt very tired. And always the heavy scent of Cynthia’s hair and her persuasive soft caresses kept playing upon his traitor senses, alluring and intolerable.

A Boy's Marriage 263

Eva stood holding open the door smiling.

"Come, it's time now to dress for dinner."

"All right, I'm coming."

She ran up to him.

"Now you must *not* be an old surly ; just put your arm round me and walk upstairs nicely . . . there—now keep step."

At the foot of the stairs he let her go, unable to bear it any longer. "You run on, I've forgotten to take off my boots."

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It was not only Beverley's disordered state of mind that saw a change in Eva's manner. She was making a conscious effort towards regaining a hold upon his affection. This was due to two chance conversations which sprang really from her secret desire for a child, a desire which had been steadily growing ; otherwise she would have allowed the opportunities which chance offered to slip by without availing herself of them. This is what had happened during Beverley's short absence. When Eva returned from the station, after seeing him off, she found Calderon full of joking sympathy with her at being left behind. "The two old men shall come in to tea with you and see what they can do to cheer you up. What do you say, Jimmy?"

264 A Boy's Marriage

So they came, and Mr. Teruel, obeying a previous hint from Calderon, left him very soon after tea. In the course of an hour or two's talk, Calderon learned much and guessed more about the position. He was entirely surprised ; and his opinion of Beverley underwent a considerable change—wholly for the better—and he regretted much that he had said to him. Naturally there was no plain speaking of any kind. Calderon's last words were, "Of course he cares for you ; from the little you've told me, any one could see that. You must show him you care. Take him in hand—and—er—don't mind if he's a little touchy—and then, why—don't be afraid of him ! You must push over the barriers that are between you. Woo him ; use your power ; and—and—go in and kiss him good night—and perhaps—well—then you might tell him about—about—wanting a child. I shouldn't let him know you've spoken to me ; and don't you feel ashamed about having mentioned this to me. Very plucky ; and—you couldn't have hit on a better person. I understand things a little ; I'm rough enough, but well—good-bye, my dearest little girl, good-bye, good-bye."

Then Marion had come back with her in the evening ; and to her Eva had expressed, tentatively at first, more fully as her confidence grew

with Marion's growing sympathy, a certain contrition at her inattention to Beverley, which something in Calderon's manner had first suggested. Partly, too, her confidence to Marion explained her own intended behaviour to herself, making it clearer and, as it were, riveting it with conviction. On parting, Marion embraced her more cordially than she had hitherto found possible.

In thought Eva was slow, but with her thought led to action by sure steps; and she was tenacious. She was pleased too. Something prompted the idea that she was able to play a part that was not so subordinate as her former conception of life suggested. She had emerged from her previous self, and almost unconsciously surveyed the old self—with pride at her development. For the first time she caught a glimpse of her power as an individual. The glimpse pleased her. So she began her new rôle without wasting any time—by a sort of instinctive wisdom. She was not yet hindered by seeing any of the difficulties which Beverley's temperament opposed to her task. She was spared from the knowledge and the pain of the knowledge that she possessed nothing to offer which he wanted.

She tapped and peeped into his room on her

266 A Boy's Marriage

way down to dinner. He was tying his tie ; so she sat down on a cane chair, gathering courage from her own boldness.

"I'll just wait, and we can go down together. What a funny face you're making ! Why, your fingers are all thumbs ! Come here ; I'm sure I could do it——"

He obeyed. The intimacy which she seemed to claim was too unexpected. He simply submitted, with a vague terror that he might soon hate her—not knowing what to do.

"There—that's fine ! Now your coat. . . . I'm simply dying to hear all about your friend and what you did—and how you enjoyed yourself. You've told me nothing yet."

And now he must stoop to the petty degradation of lying. He wondered if there had ever lived a man so base as he, a man who had had such chances, a man who had failed so ignominiously.

In the drawing-room she did not sit down in her usual chair immediately, as was her custom ; she stood by the fire very near to him.

"Do you know," she said confidently, "that last night was the first time I have been alone since we were married ?"

"Yes, it must have been." He plunged wildly into his account of the Indian friend's departure ;

A Boy's Marriage 267

anything was preferable to that kind of sentiment. He carried it on bravely half through dinner and then collapsed.

"You must have had a really good time," was her comment. "I am glad. But you do look very tired."

"You look prettier than ever." He tried to laugh it off; she stretched out her hand. He was obliged to give her his hand, and she stroked it softly, and to his horror kissed it. "No, no," she insisted, as he tried to move it away; "wait," and she slipped off a ring which she wore on her third finger and put it on his little finger. "Doesn't that look nice?"

"Yes," he said. The ring seemed to burn him. "But I might lose one of the stones."

"What does that matter? If you do, I shall always remember who lost it—and like it all the better."

"But the ring was your mother's; you value it—you——"

"Should I have put it on your finger if I hadn't valued it?"

She construed his hesitation as embarrassed delight. She congratulated herself that she was doing famously, as she put it. He was more surprised and docile than she had expected. How silly she had been not to think of making love to

268 A Boy's Marriage

him before ! It was delightful as a new game ; and she could not help noticing Jane's beaming approval.

At last dinner was over, and Beverley thought with painful relief of the consoling quiet of his own room, where he could be alone.

But with the air of a whist player who lays the last trump on the table, Jane entered with the coffee on a tray and his cigarette box.

"You may smoke here ; a much better plan than going off into that little room of yours," she said, helping herself to sugar.

"Don't you think it'll make the curtains smell ? You know how you dislike the smell of smoke up at the House."

"Oh, I've changed, I think I shall smoke myself. Let me have a puff to see if I like it." She handed it back, with a little grimace.

"But really, dearest, I've changed. You must forgive me for not having looked after you. I'm going to alter all that and be a real little companion to you, as I ought to have been long before—instead of sulking. Will you forgive me ?"

"I've nothing to forgive."

"Don't make it difficult for me." She got up. "Find a little place for me on your knee." She came to him. He saw that she was frightened,

and he saw that she was making a great effort to overcome her fear. He understood with painful exactness how she was feeling, and it cut him to the heart that he was not able to respond. She roused dismay within him, and a savage disgust at himself, when he found something in him comparing her freshness and innocence with Cynthia's heavily scented person. He was appalled too by the presence in his mind of an evil curiosity, which he had not known before. He almost hated Eva for thus making him realise his own degradation.

She knew nothing of this. She nestled up to him and began to speak, tearing his heart by her words and by her gentleness.

"We've not meant nearly enough to one another, have we? And it's been so much my fault, and I'm dreadfully sorry! I've been so horrible to you, not even trying to understand anything . . . or thinking about being a bit nice to you. I just sat and wanted you to be nice to me, and I thought you didn't want me; but I know now—that you cared more than I could understand, and you thought I didn't, and so we were both strange and horrible and proud." . . .

"Jane'll be coming in," said Beverley, getting up. His face was set. His voice trembled; he was very pale. She looked at him.

"Oh, you're tired ; you're ill," cried Eva.

"Yes, I am, dead tired—dead tired." He took a step back to prevent himself from falling.

"Oh, do tell me what is the matter ; I'm sure you're not well."

"Nothing, nothing. When one gets up suddenly one often feels dizzy, you know—don't you ever ? Surely you must—blood rushes to the brain—that's it, blood to the brain ; mine's naturally weak. That's queer when you think of it, because father's level-headed enough, isn't he ? "

She was a little alarmed at his strangeness.

"Come, I'll sit with you and read to you, and you can smoke a pipe quietly, shall I ? Some of your favourite poetry."

He could invent no means of escape ; he acquiesced. Never had he felt less inclined for poetry or for her company. Vividly he recalled the time when such a suggestion from her would have filled him with delight. The memory did not soothe him.

"Shelley I'll read, shall I ? "

"No, not Shelley," he said hastily. That would be a desecration for her to read and for him to listen to. "I'm not in the mood for Shelley to-night," he added, fearing he might have hurt her by the abruptness of his refusal.

A Boy's Marriage 271

"How about a novel? Or some prose . . .
Lamb——"

"Oh no, poetry please; the sentences are shorter and it'd be easier for me."

In his study he pulled out a quarto volume—the first edition of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. "Fine large print," he said. She chose to sit upright in his writing-chair just under the lamp, the great book on her knee. She read in the chanting sing-song of a schoolgirl, and laboriously, turning over the pages slowly as though it were a thing to which she was unaccustomed.

"The way was long, the wind was cold——"

To Beverley this reading seemed like a hideous farce. The absurd mockery of it! He felt he would have been able to appreciate the grim, the intense humour of the position, if it had not been so symbolical of his whole life's prospect. No symbol. . . . This was his life. Did he deserve better?

His head ached . . . her voice was like a careful torture, that wounds subtly.

How long would she strive to put life into what was dead? There were all Scott's poems and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* . . . how

could he prevent her from carrying on this farce ?
And what would be her next move ?

And the utter pathos of her attempt to win him back—worthless and corrupt as he now was !

Such a little, he knew, would be enough to make her happy.

She read on—taking a breath before each stanza—in a sing-song monotone which could not fail to tease all meaning completely away from any lines ; she read on as though she had been appointed to read through a certain number of pages as a punishment and she was determined to take the sting from the task by her good grace in performing it.

In turning over a page her face brightened ; she began to read more quickly, and in consequence broke down over two or three words. . . . Then with a little gasp she stopped and closed the book.

“There! That’s the end of Canto I. Haven’t I read it nicely !” she said proudly.

“Yes, very. Thank you so much.” He got up and pushed a chair near the fire.

“Sit in a comfortable chair now. I shall have one more pipe and then go up.”

“Oh, your horrid old pipe !”

He knew exactly what she meant, and said quickly—

"Tell me what you've been doing."

She sat down and filled his pipe. "No, please sit there."

"Why should I? I only want to walk about."

He saw that her lip was quivering, and he searched in despair for some means of escape.

The only comfort he found was that this kind of thing would go on until he probably became inured to it. He prayed that she might not say something which would bring matters to a head. He must have time to think—he must have time to be alone and think.

He waited in suspense, trusting that his appearance was tired and indifferent. He struck a match to light his pipe, but his hand trembled so that he blew it out, fearful that Eva might notice his agitation, and he put his pipe on the mantelpiece.

"I think I'll ring for the milk. Do you mind? Have yours now—or is it too early?" He rang.

"Oh no, you're tired; I am too."

When Jane came in with the tray she beamed lovingly. Her look obviously gave the young people her benediction, and it exasperated Beverley. He saw how impossible it would be ever to be rid of that faithful servant; his conscious wish to be rid of her showed how terribly he

had changed, showed him his depravity. Why did everything combine to prove his baseness, as though he were ignorant of it?

He supposed that he should grow accustomed to that too.

It was with a feeling of untold relief that he softly turned the key of his own door; at last he was alone. He lay down on the bed without undressing. He thought nothing, he felt nothing—except that he was alone; and then something seemed to give way within him and he burst into tears, which he could make no effort to keep back. There was no special reason for his tears, but he went on crying and his whole body shook with each breath he drew. He thought, “Perhaps if I lie flat on my back I shall stop.” So he lay quite flat; but he went on sobbing. Then he remembered that that was the remedy for bleeding at the nose; so he sat on the side of his bed, holding his head between his hands. That seemed to lessen the pain in his head, especially if he pressed quite hard against his temples. . . . He took away his hands. . . . Yes, it was certainly better to press hard. . . .

He started violently. Some one was moving the handle of his door. He sat up erect—listening—trying to listen intently through the clamour in his head, trying to breathe without letting his

breath shake his body so. His eyes were fixed on the door-handle. Was it the shaking of his body that made him think the handle turned again? Or had it in reality moved? There could be no doubt, he heard the noise again. He knew that it must be Eva, but what did she want? He waited—and listened. Then after an age of suspense he heard her door shut.

He shivered, and began to undress.

He slept very little that night and his sleep did not refresh him. He got up early and went out almost before it was fully light, fearing that Eva might come in while he was dressing. The cold autumn air chilled him, but he did not quicken his pace, nor did he wish that he had accepted the glass of milk which Jane urged him to take. Labourers passed him, strolling to their work; their breath came white from their mouths; they beat their hands against their thighs for warmth, in a strange rhythm to their rolling gait.

He must see the family that day and Calderon; chat with his father, as if nothing at all were the matter; be friendly with Marion while his heart was aching; in fact enter quietly into this smooth, peaceful existence without marring its peace and without disturbing its smoothness. This would, he thought, be so much easier if only his head

would leave off throbbing, if he were quite well. It would be more bearable if Calderon were not there, with his stupid jokes and that feeling he always roused of watching and seeing more than there was to be seen in everything.

And would Eva refer to the evening before? He longed for the quiet of the little flat at the top of the mansions in the middle of London, where he was not known; and his longing dismayed him, setting the weight of his degradation more heavily upon him.

How could he help being a hypocrite now and for ever? Even supposing he told the truth without any reserve, no one would understand how he had been led into doing what he had done. He could not understand it himself.

They might think that he was asking for their forgiveness, and he did not want their forgiveness. And Calderon might come to know; he shuddered at the idea. Then, as always with Beverley, a trivial side-issue arrested his attention and, assuming sudden overmastering proportions, prevented him from seeing anything as a whole. Calderon's contempt of him, if he knew, entirely occupied his mind as he walked back, and he pictured many scenes, none helpful, all depressing, between himself and Calderon, and the sneering jests which the man

would make at his expense ; and they would be unanswerable.

He was bitterly cold when he reached home ; the cold seemed to have pierced its way right into him.

Eva ran to meet him as he went into the dining-room.

"Oh, I'm glad you're so much better—all glowing from a nice walk before breakfast. I was really afraid you were ill last night. I came to your room, but I heard you snoring so I crept back. I thought you might like something hot to make you sleep."

"It was very kind of you."

"Perhaps," thought Beverley, encouraged and, curiously enough, a little hurt by her lack of observation, "perhaps things are going to be easier, and I may be let alone." So he made a great effort and talked his way through breakfast, though he could not eat anything. That too Eva did not observe. She was thinking how strange it was that he should fail so absolutely as he did to realise what she had gone through the evening before, in order to force herself to leave her room.

She smiled now at her ridiculous nervousness ; similarly in the morning she was always able to laugh at the terror of the dark which

278 A Boy's Marriage

sometimes seized her when she awoke in the night.

"Where's your ring? Oh, how could you take it off?"

He started; he remembered distinctly slipping it into his pocket the night before.

"I took it off when I was washing. I—I'll fetch it at once."

He went upstairs and searched through his pockets. He found it. The ring seemed to him a badge of his degradation. He hated the constant feel of it on his finger.

"I want you to wear it always on your right hand, so that when you're writing you'll be able to turn it on your finger and think of me. Will you?"

What could he say but "Yes"?

And all the family would notice it, and imagine a great reconciliation. He saw Calderon's wink of approval—well, perhaps after all it was best and would help him in his part. But it ceaselessly reminded him how shameful his part was.

He went into his room. As he shut the door, the same dizziness came upon him; he leaned against the door, then walked up to the writing-table. He must send the five-pound note to Cynthia. Five pounds did not seem a large

price for his dishonour. She did not even know his name. He stopped irresolute, pen in hand, pondering on the fact. He wondered if men usually told her their names. Why was it that at the time nothing about her had disgusted him, that only now he saw how horrible her life had made her ?

And he must write something to his Lady of the Woods ; but what ? He read through her letter again ; and once more her kindness made him suffer, and he was wounded by the memory that he had blamed her for his own baseness. He had deceived her more completely than any one else.

But what he wrote to her mattered really very little, since now through his fault no more beauty remained in their friendship.

He wrote on a blank sheet : " Here is the five pounds. I shan't ever see you again. Good-bye," and folded the note, addressed the envelope, and put it in his pocket.

The ring seemed to catch in everything.

Then he wrote to Mrs. Coltney Smith, apologising for having disturbed her, saying he was quite unworthy ever to be near her again, and asking her to think kindly of him. This too he hurriedly addressed and put in his pocket.

It was a relief to have written, to have cut himself off finally from that to which he no longer had any right. The pillar-box was quite near, and he went out with a strange satisfaction to post the two letters, as though the pain it gave him to do so must make some atonement for his disgrace.

The morning passed outwardly like other mornings, to Beverley's vague surprise. Eva and he lunched at the House ; he felt Calderon notice the ring, but nothing was said about it. Every one appeared specially attentive to him, and there seemed a kind of understanding between Calderon and Eva, who took a prominent part in the conversation. A certain consideration was paid to her, and she behaved like a special guest who expected as much, even though her aunt, whose presence she generally respected by silence, was present. Marion made him uneasy ; she seemed distracted, displeased, and Beverley imagined with fear that she must be displeased with him.

Somehow he expected Calderon would seek an opportunity of speaking with him alone, and he awaited it with resignation, knowing he could not avoid it if the man was resolved. They all lived too near each other to make escape possible ; he could only postpone the interview,

A Boy's Marriage 281

which would hang over him. There was no point in doing that; he might as well get it over at once.

He was not in the least surprised that his conjecture was correct. Calderon drew him aside exactly as he suspected. He wondered how his father could stand his vulgarity and not tire of his boisterous jokes. He took his arm.

"Let's drive into Littlehampton and hire two gees and have an hour's gallop on the sands."

The man's activity was unbearable.

"Well, there's hardly time to make it worth while. With changing——"

Calderon urged his plan, but was not at all annoyed that Beverley continued to back out of it.

"Look here," he said at last, "don't you bear a grudge against me for what I said; remember I'm your old dad's oldest friend."

"Oh, you were quite right," said Beverley indifferently.

The man's familiarity was odious.

"I know I could be of use to you if only you would talk to me. Hang it, man, don't take offence where none's meant—and (nodding meaningly he added in a whisper with a look over his shoulder) don't you be upset about your wife; you can take it from me she really

282 A Boy's Marriage

cares. I know. You've done well to wait ; now's your time."

"What do you mean?" cried Beverley, horrified. "How dare you meddle with my affairs! What right have you to——"

"Gently, gently! I can keep my own counsel. Observation; you needn't be afraid. Hullo! What's wrong? Ill? Why, man, you're worrying yourself ill all about nothing—of course I've seen you've been utterly run down for a long time; that's what interested me first, and you looked pretty queer this morning. Mind has the devil of an effect on a body like yours. Treat me as a doctor. I am one——"

"Oh, let me go. I'm all right; and don't tell any one that you think I'm not fit. I'm perfectly fit, and I hate being fussed over."

"I wish you'd let me overhaul you. No? Well—I must be off—to get the daylight."

His friendly anxiety exasperated Beverley almost more than his former interference; it put him in his power by forcing upon him an obligation.

Beverley sauntered round the garden. Every bush, every tree of it, every corner was crowded with memories of his childhood. From a little way along the drive where he was standing he could see what was once his favourite nook, in a

wide ditch so thickly overgrown that if you passed right by its side in the field you could not possibly see the chair which he used to leave there all the summer, unless you moved aside the leaves very carefully. That was a secret not even Marion knew. He never used to go to it direct from the house across the paddock, but made a great circuit and came to it from the opposite side. But once there, with small difficulty he could see all that was going on in the front garden, like a spy, and keep watch upon any enemies who might come to the front door. He remembered his immense happiness and wished those days would come again ; he remembered too his delight the first time he had shown his nook to Eva, who had been the first to know of it. But now everything was changed. He slipped off the ring into his pocket.

After tea as he lay on the sofa in his study, unable to sleep, too tired to read, merely thankful that he was alone, Marion came in.

"Don't get up, dear, you're tired. I'm afraid you must have caught a chill in the train."

"My head aches."

She put her hand on his forehead. He wished she would not touch him.

"I've news for you : important news." . . .

284 A Boy's Marriage

"What is it?"

"You're the first person I've told." . . .

"Tell me." He took her hand.

"I've accepted Bruce."

"What do you mean, accepted Bruce?"

"To be his wife."

"His wife! You—married—oh! Marion, my dear."

"Aren't you pleased? I was sure you'd be delighted. Not married yet—going to be—we shall live in Oxford."

"Are you sure you——"

"Care enough, yes. I've thought a lot about it. There'll be an excellent life for me in Oxford; and, to tell you truth, I'm getting a little tired of home."

"Marion—dearest—don't . . . not lightly—it's for always."

He longed to talk freely to her, to open her eyes. He thought she was stepping gladly, as he had stepped, to her doom. There was nothing that he could say, now less than ever. He could hardly bring himself to utter the congratulations which she expected, and which seemed hollow to him and false.

"I am glad, dear, if you're happy; don't think me cold and hard. Life's so strange. You've been so good to me always and I've been so

thankless; not really—not as much as it seemed. . . .

“Try and forgive me. . . . Do you remember the evening I came into your room, you called me in, and I brushed your hair? . . . How sleepy Ajax was, do you remember?”

“Yes, darling, I do,” she said very softly.

There was a long silence.

“It's only eighteen months—or two years ago.” Her voice was dreamy.

“Don't, don't.”

Marion hardly heard his murmured entreaty: her thoughts went back to that time before he was married. She wished with passionate regret that she had been able to prevent his marriage. Suddenly she seemed face to face with all the disquiet that had been tormenting him these long months during which she had forced herself to believe he was happy—willingly deceived herself because she could not bear the truth. She felt a coward: she had helped him so little. And now Beverley, whom she always looked upon as her little brother, was trying to warn her, and trying not to discover to her his own wretchedness.

“I'm so sorry, darling, you are not happy.” There were tears in her voice.

“It's all my fault.”

286 A Boy's Marriage

"No, no, dear. It's no one's fault."

"It's all my fault; oh, I know that well enough."

A great desire sprang up within him to tell her all, everything. And so perhaps spoil her chance of happiness? His infamy was better kept to himself.

"I'm a discontented ass"; he tried to put gaiety into his words. "Don't you worry about me; besides, I feel rather queer this evening and see everything gloomily."

"Don't joke me away from you, dear."

"I couldn't . . . couldn't tell you about things. Please don't want me to—ever. Believe me, no one can help me. You do, as it is, more than any one."

"Is it something about—about—the woman—Mrs. Darténé? Because if it is, I can guess perhaps, and you mustn't judge——"

"Oh no, no; but don't question me, dear, please. Tell me about yourself. Tell me when he wrote—old Napoleon, I mean——" The sofa was in the shadow, and it was too dark for Marion to see the tears in his eyes.

"It'll make him—make him more human to have you as his wife."

"I think I shall be able to make him happy."

"And he—will he make you happy?"

She leaned over him and again touched his forehead with her hand.

"Dear, I'm afraid you're feverish, your head's so hot."

"No, no, Maid Marion ; I'm all right. Don't suggest Nux." He tried to laugh to reassure her ; but he was convinced that something was wrong—influenza perhaps—he felt so absurdly weak and tired, and his whole body was aching almost as much as his head ached.

After Marion said good-bye to him, he lay down again on the sofa and looked forward with apathy, so complete as well-nigh to touch content, to dinner with Eva and the probable reading of the second canto of the *Last Minstrel's Lay*.

He felt too tired to suffer acutely any more ; and not even the knowledge that he had no right to Marion's sympathy, as he thought, affected him. His one resolve, any reason for which he himself but faltered at, was to keep Eva from any suspicion of his state of health. He shrank from the prospect of her attentions. With the help of champagne he managed to laugh and talk through dinner so continuously as to deceive a more observant person than Eva. She was delighted, and even more delighted when he suggested more reading. He too was pleased ; he wanted to keep her at a distance from senti-

ment, until they could come to some sort of explanation. What that explanation could be he would perhaps in time find out ; his chief hope was that none would be necessary ; he hoped that things would in some way resume their old tenour. As she read to him, he noticed for the first time a curious way she had of showing her teeth as she pronounced certain letters. He waited for their recurrence, to see if it always happened, and then he wondered without much interest whether Kitty had spent the half-sovereign in a visit to the dentist or in drinking to master the pain. His callousness did not surprise him. And Adolphus ? Of course he was not her brother ; but why of course ? He might be ; it was quite likely that he was.

“There I knew it, you're not listening. I have read the same stanza twice over and you have not noticed.”

“No, did you really ?—well, that is——” he stammered.

She shut the book with a bang and dropped it on the floor.

“It's horrid of you and I hate reading.”

“The sound of your voice is so soothing——” he rose immediately she did, fearful of a scene ; fiery sparks kept darting about in front of his eyes. He turned and leaned against the mantel-

piece. "Do go on! Such a pity to stop when we've not finished the second canto. And there's *Marmion* yet and *Rokeby*, and a little companion to read them. I feel like a sultan; I enjoy listening, but don't you bother if you'd rather knit in the drawing-room or sew. Or mother makes vests, you know—vests and blankets and blankets, hundreds of woolly blankets, why not try? That'd make your life quite exciting and——"

He turned and saw she had left the room. He moved his hand over his forehead, laughing strangely. He laughed as he made a grab at the sparks that glittered fantastically in front of his eyes. "Stop it, you little devils," he muttered.

Eva sat in the drawing-room, quite certain in her own mind that he would follow her soon and make it up. He had not been so cheerful for a long time as he had been at dinner. Moreover, in the event of his not coming up she had formed a plan which seemed so good that she decided to wait a very short time for him. She waited ten minutes and he did not come. She rang for Jane and told her to bring the milk to her bedroom, as soon as it was hot. She could not keep from smiling as she spoke. Then she went upstairs, and rather frightened and blushing at her own

audacity, she removed the key from Beverley's door. He should not go to sleep without saying good night to her. She imagined his surprise and delight at her forgiveness. She knew he thought that she was angry with him for not listening to the reading. As if that mattered, the silly boy !

When Jane came into the study, Beverley started so that he thought he must have been asleep.

"I've taken Mrs. Beverley's milk to her room, sir."

"Oh yes—thanks."

He could not remember what he had said to Eva . . . something to hurt her feelings. . . . She had run away. Well, that evening was over successfully—the worst evening—to-morrow his head would be aching less, could not at any rate ache more, and he had carried it off all right once ; so that he could again.

He laughed, and wondered what there was funny enough to make him laugh. It was those dancing sparks, bright little devils, that were so funny. A little thunderstorm in his head—that was the lightning ; no, it wasn't lightning. His brain had got too hot—red-hot—and some small devil was hammering the sparks from it in mischief. Absurd—nonsense—what had he

A Boy's Marriage 291

said to Eva? . . . And Marion was going to marry Bruce. . . . Bruce would make a good husband. . . .

He began to hum the March of the Priests in *Athalie*.

All his past life swept suddenly before him—his games with Marion, the coming of the tutor (how he hated him at first and how he loved him afterwards? Where was he now?) His life at Oxford, his marriage, that terrible fortnight at Penzance, his Lady of the Woods—the woman who was born happy—ah, why was he not happy?—and all led up to this moment, to the man with the aching head and no hope, who was glad that his wife had gone to bed and spared him the pain of falsely wishing her good night—a miserable, craven creature—sitting there alone—and that craven was himself.

He went upstairs to his room, and the consciousness that it was no longer necessary to make any effort brought a kind of peacefulness to him. The pain in his head was less violent; sleep seemed possible for him. He noticed the absence of the key and looked on the floor, stooping to see if it had fallen out. No suspicion was roused in him, and he was sure that Eva would not be anxious enough, injured as she was, to pay him another visit. Time and the hour

run through the roughest day, he thought, as cool sheets touched and soothed his body. After all, the peace of being alone in the darkness was some recompense for the effort of living through the day. He had forfeited every right to any joy ; he would no longer struggle to put something into his life ; his purpose in future would be passive, to suffer as little as possible and to bear his suffering with patience. That, he knew now, was the true secret of life.

He was almost asleep when he opened his eyes at a slight noise. Before he was fully conscious what the white figure hurrying across the room with a candle could be, he felt Eva's arms round his neck and heard her voice—

“How could you be going to sleep without having wished me good night ; it isn't kind of you——”

He disengaged her arms. He tried to collect his thoughts and appear quite calm, as he said, holding her wrists—

“Why, you ran away from me yourself. Good night, dear ; you'll catch cold——” But his voice trembled and sounded strange, and that made Eva glad. She was quite sure that the reason for the trembling and the strangeness in his voice was nothing but his utter delight in being forgiven, in seeing that she cared enough

to come herself and make it up with him, even though he had behaved so badly.

There was a thief in the candle, and the flame swayed and flared fitfully.

"You'll take cold," he repeated, dazed and horrified. "Are you ill?"

"No, no," with a quick movement she hid her face on his neck; "no, I'm not ill. Only I don't want always to be alone; don't you understand? I get frightened. Why did you just leave me? I know more now; it was my fault, and I do love you, and——"

"Hush, don't—what do you mean?"

"I don't want to go away from you, ever; let me come close to you, don't make it hard for me, it's so difficult—and——"

"That's all past, all past and gone."

"What's past?"

"I don't want you." Her arms seemed to be choking him. "How can I make you understand?" He got up; she still nestled against him.

"Why don't you want me when I am your little wife, and I love you—and I've come to you now all by myself; make me understand, why aren't I like other—like other women, who have babies—I *want* a child (she whispered). I want and I know so little—you must tell me—why

294 A Boy's Marriage

haven't you before—instead of just leaving me alone——”

“You must go, you must go.”

“And Jane tells me that husband and wife should sleep together. And I would like to feel your arms round me, I should indeed. I shouldn't feel lonely—let me just creep in beside you.”

“You must go.”

“Why are you angry with me? I can't go back to that dark room again.” She began to cry and shiver.

“Come with me.”

He took the candle, waiting by the door for her to follow him.

“You . . . make . . . me . . . ashamed.”

“Come.” His head was reeling. Giving her the candle, she passed into her own room again. The door shut and he was in darkness. He managed to grope his way back.

Eva cried a little, but not at his unkindness. Her tears came as the aftermath of her daring. She went to sleep, glad that she had been able to take what she thought to be the first great step.

Beverley lay awake.

For the first time he saw the full horror of his position, and saw that there was no retreat possible for him. He could not endure the

thought of simulating love to Eva, of acting a continuous lie, of having children, perhaps, playing round him, whose every smile, every movement, would be a reproach to him, unless he became callous to shame. Oh, better that he were dead than that, better a thousand times that he were dead than live a life of smiling falsehood—than live for ever conscious of his secret infamy.

XVI

THE doctor said that he was suffering from a complete nervous breakdown, which had made him an easy prey to influenza. Careful nursing and rest, and an eventual change of scene would, he said, be all that was necessary. He was a cheerful man and dwelt upon the stamina of a young constitution, the effect too of some insignificant worry upon a highly strung boy.

Calderon found him a congenial spirit.

The family were very much upset, but not at all alarmed. Eva crept about the house with an air of sad importance, and was indefatigable in the superintending of his gruel and in obeying the injunctions which Stephanie imposed upon her. Mr. Teruel had suggested that Stephanie should come as nurse ; and the doctor, who knew her capabilities from experience, when attending one of her lodgers, heartily endorsed the suggestion. That she was able to be once more of practical use to Mr. Teruel delighted Stephanie. Her apartments were unlet until Christmas ; her

A Boy's Marriage 297

daughter was gladly taken in by a friendly neighbour ; everything was arranged within an hour of receiving his message.

Mr. Teruel first of all broached the matter to Beverley alone.

"You must have a nurse, my boy : none I know of more—er—more competent than Mrs. Dartené, do you mind ?"

And Beverley pressed his father's hand, touched by his hesitation and faith in the woman.

He had won Stephanie's heart directly by smiling at her and saying, "I like you to be nursing me."

Her presence perplexed him. She seemed such a strange factor in his father's life ; and yet her presence became inexplicably natural. He supposed it must be her devotion which made her fit so perfectly into the household. Every one respected her, and more than that, every one liked her . . . and with amazing swiftness. Even Jane liked her, who was disposed to think that it was her own right to look after her boy when he was ill.

At first his body's weakness took away from his mind's power of pain. The fever was like an opiate, of the effects of which he was dimly conscious. At night he was slightly delirious.

It was a relief to have nothing expected of

him. Every one was so kind. The snow began to fall ; and his bed was moved a little from the wall along which it lay that he might watch the flakes falling noiselessly, as the snow spread its white mysterious covering over the brown earth. They put bread-crumbs on the window-sill ; and the sparrows soon saw them and soon found courage, at first to hurry away with the bread in their beaks and then to peck up the crumbs, as though they had been used to perch always on the sill and feed. Two robins often came, and sometimes a starling or a thrush.

When the fever left him, it left his body worn out ; but a cloud seemed removed from his mind, and he noticed things again and more acutely outlined than before. All the kindness began to hurt him more than brutality could have done.

The doctor wondered why he did not regain his strength more rapidly. There was no apparent reason for his entire lack of interest. The only thing he liked at all was for his mother to sit by him and knit and talk to him about the days when he and Marion were little children. He was never tired of listening to her stories, which helped to distract his mind from the present. Marion talked to him too, but with her he was uneasy. She was going to be

married ; she knew besides a little of the truth about himself, and he feared her sympathy.

His weakness seemed to keep him aloof from life. He did not think that he would die and he did not think that he would recover. He lay and looked at the life around him, which was his life, and he looked at it wondering, as a spectator of a strange sight looks and wonders.

His father used to come and stand at the top of his bed, and was chiefly doubtful whether he ought to put the pipe he held in his hand into his mouth ; and he never appeared to give a thought to the two women who had played such a curious part in his life—Beverley's mother and Stephanie. Their presence he accepted. Beverley, watching him, was not impressed by the sacredness of life, rather life seemed fantastic.

And when Eva looked into the room, as she frequently did when others were there, and beckoned out Stephanie mysteriously, life seemed to him pathetic as well as grotesque ; pathetic that she should be doing her best to nurse back to health the man who preferred death to becoming the father which she wanted. All this care and kindness lavished on an ineffectual fellow who had just grace enough not to disillusion them about his worthlessness ! Such was the constant trend of Beverley's thoughts.

300 A Boy's Marriage

And his thoughts hardly hurt him. It seemed as though he were past feeling anything more.

He lay and looked and wondered.

He lay as a man lies who has been suffering fierce pain from some deep wound in his body—who when the pain has ceased lies motionless, afraid even to breathe but lightly, lest he may revive the intolerable aching. Such a man welcomes a slight change of posture which brings momentary relief, and the respite prompts the hope that the worst is past. So Beverley found a kind of ease in lying aloof and watching, until little by little he was drawn down again from his position, and he could no longer wonder at the kind people who tended him—but only wonder at himself—his own inexplicable weakness—wickedness—which had turned his life into a long deceit. And then every act of kindness stung him like a mute reproach, and every thought of his father mocked him. If he could only understand! If he could only see things for a moment clearly! His dreams of life had been so beautiful, and yet his life was so ugly. And no one seemed to mind at all. It must be himself that was polluted—and everything was tainted to his vision. He fought against the idea. But it gained ground within him with all the quiet irresistible force of certainty, and he

laughed at his cowardly effort to escape from the truth ; he laughed at the absurdity of his daring to blame the universe, of a little creature like himself finding fault with the immense order of things, because the little creature wanted some one to love him as he wanted to be loved, and could not find any one.

Much to the doctor's bewilderment the fever laid hold of Beverley again. The relapse alarmed the doctor as much as it mystified him. At night Beverley was delirious, and during the day his temperature sank below normal. There was a consultation. No one but Stephanie and a second nurse that was summoned were allowed in the room.

But gradually his strength diminished.

And as his bodily strength diminished a strange peace brooded over his mind, as the snow broods softly upon the fields, keeping the earth warm with delicate white covering, and he saw as a man sees in a vision, suddenly and clearly and without surprise.

Death is the veil which those who sleep call life ;
They sleep, and it is lifted.

And as the veil slowly lifted he saw all things in a new light—without bitterness, that taint of little men who suffer and exclaim, and learn from

suffering only its petty, only its sordid truths. Death came, and coming lent him something of its greatness, something of its own impersonal majesty. His soul seemed in touch with what was infinite. His little troubled life was at an end. Silence and rest were waiting for him. Time had no further meaning. The past years seemed a foolish nightmare, as swiftly lived as a moment's dream of a moment, and now he was waking to life.

Well he knew the country he had only to close his eyes to inhabit. He had often seen it in dim shadow form ; now all its sights and sounds were clear and real, clearer than the small, obscured room he sometimes saw, more real than the hushed voices he sometimes heard. It was that new world through which the spirit of love passed on her way to the man of men. He followed her footsteps so closely that he smelled the renewed fragrance of the flowers, saw the fawns bound away gladly, observed the new gladness, the new freshness of a world in which hatred was not, in which fear was not, of a world where it was possible to live "as if to live and love were one." He knew it was the creation of his own hope ; the reward perhaps of what was sincere in his longing for love. He passed slowly along. . . . Was that his mother he seemed to

A Boy's Marriage 303

see a very long way off with tears in her eyes ? . . . poor little mother to be crying ; he stretched out his hand to her, and to his surprise he seemed to touch her hand with his . . . he passed slowly along nevertheless ; the air was warm and fresh as the air is on a summer morning before the dew has quite gone, and all the creatures looked at him at first uneasily, but their uneasiness gave way to a smile of welcome and they went on, each with his own business . . . a little more happily for his coming. The flowers raised and drooped their heads again in gracious salutation as he passed ; the soft moss caressed his feet as they touched it ; the leaves of the trees whispered a rustling welcome. . . . On a high mountain he saw the shape of a woman poised like an eagle, and she was watching. Well he knew who she was, and well he knew that she was watching for him. Swiftly and softly she sped floating down towards him until she stood by his side . . . and all the birds sang with joy and all the flowers lifted their heads and the leaves of the trees rustled gladly at her coming. And she folded her arms round him and bent her head over his.

And Death shall be the last embrace of her
Who takes the life she gave, even as a mother,
Folding her child, says, "Leave me not again."

.

So at the moment of Beverley's death there was a smile upon his dead face, from which all the trouble had departed. "Fortunate contraction of the muscles," grunted Calderon to himself. And he lay awake all that night and a large part of many following nights thinking what he could do to comfort his old friend Teruel—who at length resumed his life of habit, but somewhat desperately. His wife stopped more often than she used to before in her knitting on account of the tears that came to her eyes, tears of sorrow at the thought of her happy son cut off in the prime of his youth, tears of joy at the peacefulness of his death.

XVII

AGAIN the quadrangle of the old College at Oxford, and the grey walls dripped with the falling sleet and thawing snow from sill and roof and crevice.

Bruce shivered as he kicked the snow off his boots and went into his room. He had come back from the funeral. He laid his top-hat with its broad black band upon the table on which lay a note for him, and emptied his overcoat pockets—a pipe, a pouch, some papers, and a letter which he had forgotten. It was addressed to “Beverley Teruel, Esq.”; he remembered taking it from the postman that morning in order to spare them one shock of pain. He walked up to the fire to burn it; but then, not out of curiosity so much as to share one last confidence of his dead friend, he opened the letter and read it.

“Dear little Friend,

“I did not understand your letter, and I put it on one side thinking you would write again. And now in the rush of my life a month has

306 A Boy's Marriage

passed by—incredibly fast. You seem unhappy, dear. Let us have a long talk together ; perhaps I could help you. So gladly I would keep a day from the locusts at the end of next week for my little friend, if he would care to come.

“ Yours,

“ L. W.

“ P.S.—But he *must* let me know.”

He put the letter into the fire and savagely pushed it deep into the red glow with his wet boot, which hissed.

He welcomed the invitation that he found in the twisted note on the table from the kindly Dean. The memory of his last evening at College with Beverley kept coming back to him with dreadful persistence.

He hummed the first bars of his march sadly to himself as he splashed across the quadrangle. Some freshmen were singing and talking in the large room to which he had taken Beverley—men who did not know “Girlie”—and he always connected the large room on the second floor with that last evening. Tunes from the latest Gaiety success were being hammered out, and men sang the snatches which they knew. . . . He knocked at the Dean's door and went in.

“ Oh, come in, my dear fellow, come in. I

A Boy's Marriage 307

have here a little port wine—you must really have a glass to keep out this wet, this thaw——”

And as Bruce drank his wine in the comfortable panelled room, he seemed to be sinking quietly back into his ordered life once more.

He married Marion, and when in a few years Eva married again Marion and he spent the greater part of each vacation at the Lodge, which Beverley's memory made very dear to them.

THE END

